

1872

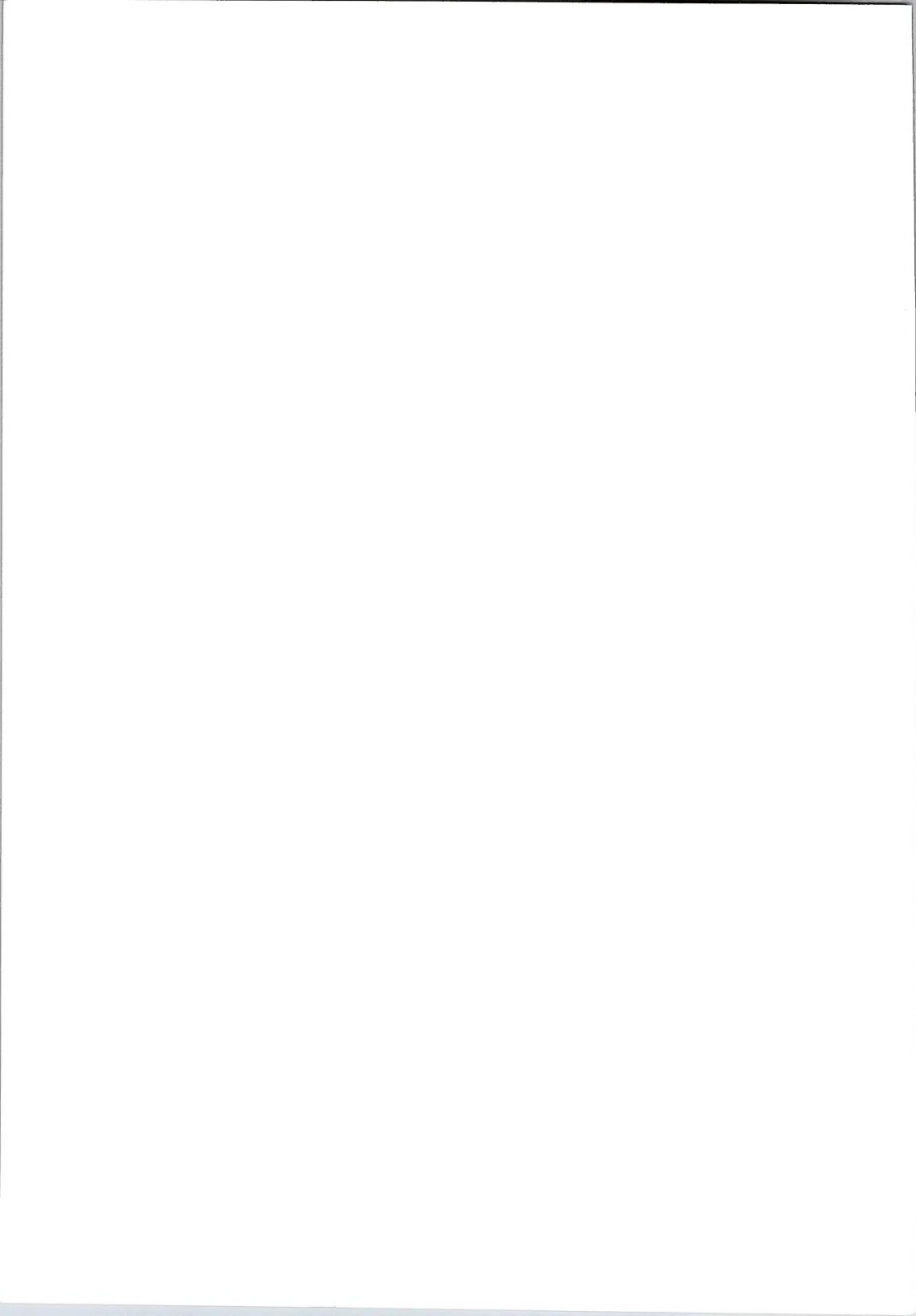


1997



**125th Jubilee**  
of the  
**RAKAIA SCHOOL**





**125th Jubilee**  
**of the**  
**RAKAIA SCHOOL**  
**1872-1997**

**(Incorporating Awaroa, Overdale, and St. Ita's)**

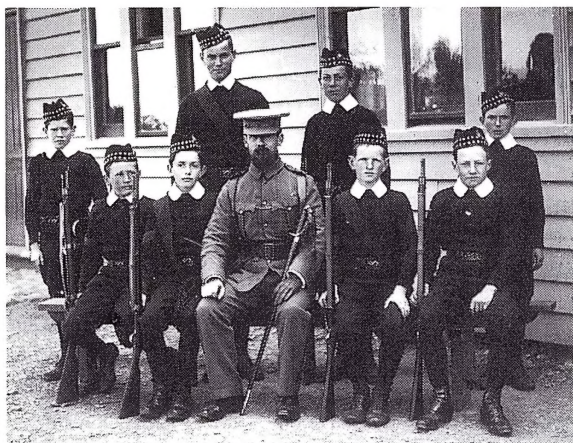
**by**  
**Laurie Cromie and Lee Halliday.**

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Rakaia School Cadets,  
1905.



Dental Clinic,  
1932.



Sports Day,  
1963.



## FOREWORD

Rakaia School was formally established on the 15th of October, 1872 at a public meeting in Mr. Barker's woolshed. A majority vote indicated a desire that the locality be turned into an Education District, and an aided school was established. This served until 1873 when a School District was officially designated. By the next March the school's 24 enrolled students were ready to move into their very own newly built schoolhouse.

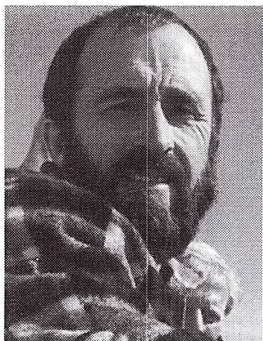
The history of Rakaia School and community during its first century has been very ably documented in a booklet, *Rakaia and Consolidated Schools' Centennial, 1872 - 1972*. It was decided that this information should be updated and expanded in a complimentary publication, compiled for the Rakaia School 125th Jubilee Celebrations.

The story of a school (particularly a rural school) is not one of bricks and mortar, but the story of a changing, growing community. Like every community, Rakaia has seen its fair share of joys and sorrows, times of celebrations and loss, friendships and farewells. At a time like this we remember those who are not with us to share this celebration.

Two staff members who will be particularly remembered are Fraser Barton and more lately, Joy Schout. Mr. Barton, who was associated with the school from 1963 until his retirement in 1982, passed away on the 15th May, 1995. Remembered by many as a strict disciplinarian, he was also dedicated to his school and community. There was a private side to Fraser, and many remember the fruit distributed from his garden and the enduring friendships this man offered during his time with us. Another, more recent face will be especially missed. Joy Schout joined the staff in 1989, filling a position as Teacher's Aide. From that time until her death she had played a special part in the life of the school, as teacher, parent and friend. Joy died as a result of an accident on the 17th February, 1996.

The compilers of this booklet, Laurie Cromie and Lee Halliday, hope that they have captured a little of the human face of the community you all know and love in this booklet, and that you will see something of yourself between its pages. The compilers wish to thank the many contributors who have so generously shared their time, records, and photographs, and most importantly, their precious memories with us. Our thanks, also to Colin Mc George who gave his time so willingly to edit material before publication. This booklet would not have been possible without you.

Humbly, we also recognise our limitations. Some errors and omissions will inevitably creep into this booklet, however hard we try to keep them at bay. We apologise for these and ask the reader's forbearance in the face of such imperfections. These shortcomings aside, we believe this booklet will provide a fitting memento of the 125th Jubilee, and bring back many wonderful memories to all who have been part of the school.



## *A Message from the Chairman, Board of Trustees*

The heartening numbers returning to the school reunion can attest to the importance of those bonds made in our formative years. Much has changed in Rakaia over 125 years but the desire to provide the best possible schooling for our young generation remains. The capability and enthusiasm of our teachers and the strength of the relationship between the school and the community are central, particularly in a rural school.

The guiding principles behind "Tomorrow's Schools" allow communities to have much greater influence, through their elected Boards of Trustees, over the many facets of running a school. Staffing, finances, bus routes, and overall governance are now being handled at community level when previously we had to rely on decisions made in Wellington. While this gives much positive scope for motivated communities; it also asks a lot of them, and their elected representatives. Time will tell if this is sustainable.

The task for successive Boards of Trustees is to build on that which is good about "Tomorrow's Schools" and to do away with that which is better handled elsewhere, keeping in mind the paramount objective of a better education for our children.

On behalf of the Rakaia School Board of Trustees, I would like to thank the Jubilee Committee for its efforts in bringing all this together and I wish you all an enjoyable and fulfilling reunion.

John Burton Chairman,  
Rakaia School Board of Trustees.

## *A Message from the Jubilee Committee Chairman*

I would like to extend a welcome to all who were able to attend this our 125th year Jubilee of Rakaia and Consolidated Schools and may many friendships be renewed. To those who were unable to attend I hope this booklet will bring back many memories of both school days and of the district.

While it is not possible to record all of the history of the schools and Rakaia area in one small booklet an attempt has been made to cover as many areas/subjects as possible. A lot of research has been done to verify the accuracy of this material but we apologise for any mistakes that may be included.

Thank you to Lee Halliday, Laurie Cromie and their helpers for their research and work in compiling this booklet.

May you all enjoy reading it as much as I have.

John Stubbs,  
Committee Chairman.



Back Row: Allen Moore, Carolyn Nordquist, Anne Gardiner, Claire Gardiner, Ngaire Love, Vicki Nisbet, Mavis Johnston, Jeanette Doody, Lindsay Smith.

Middle Row: Linda Cromie, Gloria Johns, Dianne Doody, Pauline Doody, Thelma Baker, Effe Gardiner, Eileen van Leeuwen, June Gardiner.

Front Row: Dina Johnston, Laurie Cromie, Natalie Gardiner, John Stubbs, Heather McKimmie, Lawrie Bell, Roy Gardiner.





## ***Present Principal, Ivan Jones, comments***

Jubilees are a time for us to look back over the last few years and remember the special events that have occurred in the life of our school. As I look back over the last ten years, the major change has been the change from Education Board administration of schools to a Board of Trustees. The change brought with it many difficulties as the new system was introduced. It also brought a steep learning curve for members of the B.O.T. and the Principal. The key question we ask about any change is "What are the benefits?" In my opinion the benefits are the opportunity for the teachers and the Boards of Trustees to work together to plan the budget to make the best use of resources for the children in the school. At Rakaia School there has been an ongoing development of resources to meet the teaching and learning needs of the revised curriculum. We have been supported with additional funds raised by the community to purchase computers, sports equipment, library books, adventure playgrounds.

There has been a great deal of time and energy given to the school by many people through being involved as members of the B.O.T., The Support Group, Housie, working bees, helping with trips, donations . . . the list goes on. We can all see the results of all this work reflected in a well resourced and maintained school.

My thanks for and on behalf of the children go to all the people involved in the operation of the school. Each person in contributing to the school's activities has helped to ensure the best use is being made of the resources we have available, in both people and equipment.

## ***Head Teachers*** **1972 to Present Day**

	1963-1982	Mr. F. R. Burton
	1982-1987	Mr. D. Adams
1987	Mrs. J. Robinson (3 months as relieving temporary Principal)	
	1987-1992	Mr. I. D. Jones
	1993	Mr. J. G. Hooper
	1994-	Mr. I. D. Jones



# *Past Principals reflect on Rakaia School*

## **DAVE ADAMS**

Dave has many treasured memories of his time at Rakaia. Music has played quite an important part in school life, and he fondly remembers Liz Depree at the piano, and Thecla O'Sullivan (Lill) encouraging the less obviously talented students with the "bazuka". What the children lacked in talent they made up for in enthusiasm, and to Dave, that was all about. Some things have changed, he feels, but the times spent at school is as important as it ever was. Schools should be positive and inclusive experience for children, and efforts must be made to see they do not fall by the wayside, particularly in the 7-14 age group, where young people are particularly vulnerable.

## **JOHN HOOPER**

John Hooper now lives and teaches in Papua New Guinea, with his wife, Karen and family. The Hooper family's present lifestyle is very different from the one they enjoyed in New Zealand, but he marvels at the ingenuity his students display, making the best of what they have. John says of his present students, "when my boys play soccer they only wear a shoe on their kicking foot. I notice after about six months when the shoe is worn out, they swap shoes and kick with the other foot!" However John has many wonderful memories of his time at Rakaia, and was only too pleased to share them with us, for the Jubilee.

His favourite yarn is dedicated to the 1993 senior students who "allowed him to win the decorated car competition, on the last day of school". The funny thing was, he says, he didn't know he was going to be a competitor until Nicola Hislop stood up in assembly and said the Room 4 students would like to thank him for everything he had done for them. To show their appreciation they had entered his car in the "Principal's Decorated Car Competition". Sure enough, outside the main gate his poor red Subaru 4WD had been transformed with shaving cream, toilet paper, and all sorts of little surprises!

Another amazing transformation John experienced at Rakaia was in the enthusiastic maintenance of school plantings. He writes, "I could never get over the speed at which the Rakaia School Board of Trustees could trim trees. If I asked for one or two of the trees to have a bit of a trim, I would return to find them cut off at ground level or pruned so rigorously one could hardly recognise them!" He has quite a soft spot for those "good keen men!" and their chainsaws, even now!

John wishes the Rakaia School Community congratulations on their 125th Jubilee, and all the best for the future.

## FORMER PUPILS

When Former Principal, Dave Adams was contacted for his Rakaia School reflections, one of the first things he remembered was that in 1984, two students won science awards at the Timaru Science Festival. It was a matter of some pride to Mr. Adams when pupils from his small country school did well in the wider community. It is a feeling shared by many staff, parents, and former pupils of the school.

Many members of the Rakaia School and its community have gone on to make their mark. Champion shearer, Grant Smith, whose world merino shearing records brought him the Mid Canterbury Sportsman of the Year Award in 1994, and Tony Coster, who is currently ranked 10th in New Zealand for Open Shearing. Mark Cromie has recently become the World Jetboat Champion for an unprecedented third time. Mana Manuel's son Rikki, is a respected woodcarver, and staff member, Mr. J. Widdup was selected to represent Mid Canterbury in Rugby, in 1973.

These are just a few of the people who have put Rakaia on the map, and become fine role models for today's students. The list goes on, and I am sure that Rakaia school members could add many more to it. Perhaps it is the David and Goliath Syndrome, but success seems particularly sweet when someone hails from a small country community like our own.



The School circa 1900.

# *Rakaia — The Last 25 years*

## **THE RAKAIA AND CONSOLIDATED SCHOOLS' CENTENNIAL, 1872-1972**

The Rakaia and Consolidated Schools Centennial was held at Rakaia on the 7th, 8th, and 9th of January, 1972. The programme for the centennial celebrations included an informal *Conversazione* at the school, the Grand Centennial Ball, a banquet, teenagers dance, and a parade through the township. A Centennial Committee, headed by Roy Gardiner, had two and a half years to bring this ambitious project to fruition.

It was a huge undertaking. An estimated 640 guests attended the Centennial Banquet, held in the Malting company premises, richly decorated for the occasion with flower arrangements so huge, they stood in 44 gallon drums! The Centennial cake created for the occasion by Mesdames D. Cromie, J. Gardiner, C. Dunlea, E. van Leeuwen, J. Baxter and P. Smith, was a true magnum opus, containing a staggering 90 eggs and 36 lbs. of fruit. The cake was ceremoniously cut at the conclusion of the Centennial Banquet by Mrs. Lowe, the school's oldest former student.

The Grand Centennial Ball was another highlight of the weekend. Some 500 elegantly attired guests twirled and dipped on the dance floor in the Community Centre to the Nu Hi Fi band, or caught up with old friends in the gallery above. Catering for such large numbers was quite a challenge, and supper was offered in several "sittings" so the tables could be replenished and everyone had plenty to eat.



Dalgety Float. The Centennial Parade, 1972.





Centennial Celebrations, 1972.  
Competitors in the Beard Growing Competition, and Miss Stayt, the Judge.

competition for the men was the “Beard Growing Contest” judged by the lovely Miss Stayt, a local radio announcer. She had a wonderful time adjudicating the champion, bushiest, most colourful, and sexiest beard (the last category being won by Mr. Barton!)

Centennial Committee Chairman, Roy Gardiner, felt in retrospect the weekend went off like clockwork, thanks to the combined effort of a “Top Hat” group of people. It did take a lot of hard work and organisation, but it was worth it. Even after the Centennial had officially ended there were many hands to make light work of the cleanup. Apparently the highlights of the final working bee would have made good copy for the Fraser’s “Daily Bulletin”, but it was strictly off the record, an opportunity to wind down and relax.

## **RAKAIA SCHOOL 1972 - 1997**

As Ivan Jones mentioned in the Principals’ Message, many things have changed in Education in the last twenty-five years. Staff and pupils came and went, as did school milk, cocoa (a penny a cup!), and the biennial “Trips to Wellington” which are so fondly remembered by many.

At the end of 1985, official notification was made that the Catholic School in Rakaia, St. Ita’s, was to close. Six students were transferred to the Rakaia School roll to start in the new year. See the history section for more information on St. Ita’s Church and School.

The bus route, for all the discussion it continues to engender, is a good example of the certainty of change. In fact the bus route has always been a political hot potato. In May, 1971, after much wrangling, an exasperated Mr. Barton reports that “Finally the new bus service appears to be running satisfactorily,... and most people seem to be happy,” but this tranquil state of affairs was doomed to be shortlived. Since then there have been at least three major reviews of the school bus service, and frequent adjustments to try and



accommodate the changing student population at Rakaia. This is what the democratic process is all about, and long may it continue.

There have been many changes in the administration of Rakaia School over the years; some in response to the changing needs within the school, and some in response to policy changes at a national level. In 1985 the Rakaia Primary School Committee and Home and School Committee merged into one more effective body - the Rakaia School Council, which met for the first time in August, 1985.

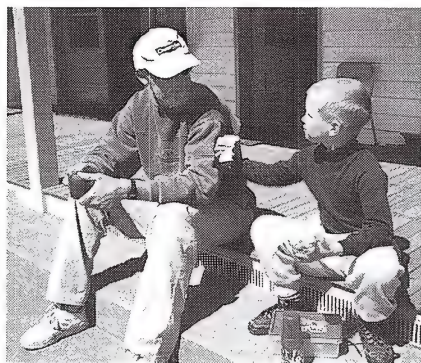
In early 1989 the first discussions were held between Margaret Reeves from the Ministry of Education, and school representatives about the implications and implementation of aspects of the "Picot Report". Nominations were called for a Board Of Trustees and the positions were filled by some members of the old Council, and three new members.

Whether the staff, and more particularly, the parents were aware of it at the time, the introduction of "Tomorrow's Schools" initiated a steep and rocky learning curve for everyone involved in schools up and down the country. Heather McKimmie, one of the original B.O.T. members, recalls. "The first nine months were very demanding on staff and us. There were training courses, and a raft of paperwork- a lot of it not particularly helpful. We had to come to terms with accounting, forming policies, creating sound support networks. The support systems that had just been there now had to be paid for, and in the end the books had to balance. "

On the positive side, the school had more autonomy to respond to its own needs than ever before. The strengths of a small rural school are significant and important. The children bond with a smaller group of people and stay with that group throughout their time at the school. You can't hide in a small community and are often forced to find your own solutions to unique problems, so it makes



A Pet Day.



Grandparents' Day.

sense that parents have a say in how money is spent. Still the pressure remains for everyone to "do everything by the book" that was not so apparent in the past.

As a country school, Rakaia had always been strongly integrated with the community. Irene Mattson, a Rakaia resident whose family associations with the school started with her grandparents in the 1880's, explained that because Rakaia had a fairly stable population, "You knew everybody in town".

In the past though, the parents supported the school in the township, their involvement did not spread to the classroom where the teachers were boss, and the parents left them to it. The families were more comfortable offering their support in more practical ways, donating a sack of spuds or a bale of hay for fundraising, or attending a working bee to spruce up the grounds. The teachers knew the parents and their situation well enough to know when to quietly hand out an extra sandwich to a child without enough lunch, or have a private word if necessary, without making an issue of things.

When the Board of Trustees came into being, a general recommendation was made that a new parent community group be created as a democratic channel between the general community and the Board. The benefits of this system run both ways, keeping the lines of communication open and keeping people informed - very important in a community where people are so involved with the school.



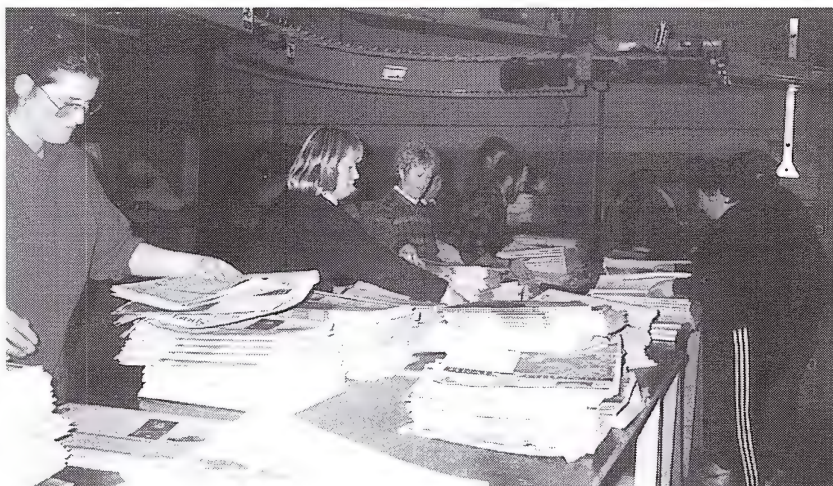
Easter Activities.





The School Choir.

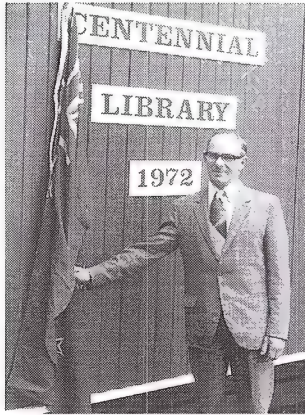
Part of this involvement must come from the practical support and fundraising the community has done to ensure their children get the best education they can. Over the years parents have cheerfully chopped firewood, cooked hot dogs, run social events, even worked through the night inserting supplements in "The Press!". Community "Housie" and raffles, initiated by Barbara Hislop and a small committee have proved good money spinners for the school, allowing the purchase of books, computer equipment, and many other things.



Rakaia School Parents burn the midnight oil on "The Press" run, August, 1995.

# *Property and Grounds*

## **BUILDING AND DEVELOPMENT, 1972 - 1997**

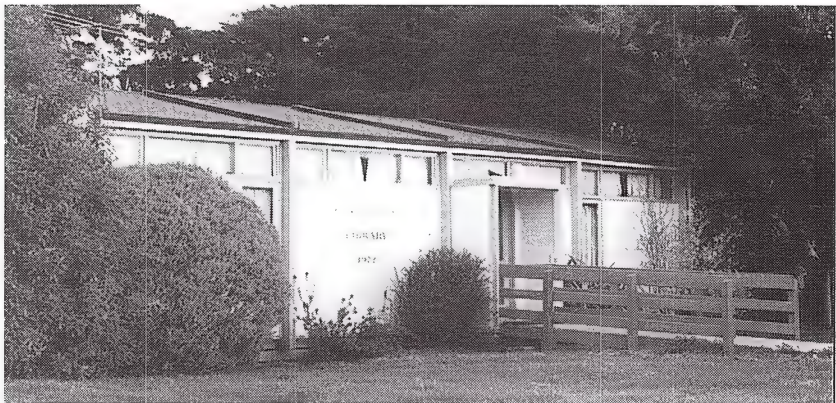


Mr. Roy Gardiner at the opening of the Centennial Library.

The early seventies were a period of substantial development for Rakaia School. The old prefab. building on the Dental Clinic site had been removed and the new prefab. unit was ready for occupation. The old bus shed in Mackie Street had been removed and gone to Kaikoura. One of the biggest projects the school undertook at this time was the building of the school library.

After the Centennial in 1972, the Centennial Committee turned its attention to the aquisition of a badly needed library. The Committee offered a donation from the proceeds of the Centennial to get the project underway. Application was made to the Education Board and by February, 1975, the

new building was near completion. The Centennial Library was opened on the 12th April, 1975. The library continues to be a well used asset to the school, doubling as learning space, Assembly Hall, and Auditorium for presentations and school plays. Regular fundraising by school families over the years have ensured the library remains well equipped and stocked with a good range of books.



Library.



## TEACHERS ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation of the teaching staff within the Rakaia township was a perpetual difficulty. By 1971 the minutes report "that there is a definite need for some housing close in for teachers, however there is none available at present." It was felt that this lack of adequate housing contributed to the unsettlement of staff at the school and several teachers indicated their wish to leave, on such grounds, before their first year was over. Tom Rangi, who taught at Rakaia for several years from 1967 can attest to the problem even then.

Rakaia was Tom's first teaching placement in the South Island. He still remembers getting off the train, still in his army uniform, and walking into the local Pub which was to be his home for the foreseeable future. It may not have been the ideal teacher's residence, but Tom admitted the locality did have its advantages. "Being at the Pub allowed me to meet half the male population of Rakaia on the first day!" He recalls. Tom was able to procure 'digs' after a while with Mana Manuel, and eventually rented the range-warden's cottage on Acton Rd., but for other staff the problem remained.

After much discussion it was recommended that "consideration be given to a mobile- type house or flat" for staff accommodation. The go-ahead was given to investigate the project with builders and make earnest application to the Board, explaining Rakaia's special needs in this area. Work commenced on the flats in 1974, and the finished flats were occupied by February, 1975.

The face of the school continued to change quietly over the years. A new tractor shed and tool shed was erected in 1973, a new boiler room was built in 1976, and in 1979 the old Dental Clinic was removed, finding a new home at Haldon Station. A new sports shed was erected in 1994 for the storage of sports gear and equipment.

## PROPERTY AND GROUNDS

Parents and staff of Rakaia School have always worked hard to maintain the grounds to a standard which would be the envy of many larger schools. It is a sobering thought to realise the mature trees which provide shelter for the children today were tiny seedlings when they were first planted by their parents and grandparents. Some of those saplings have had a perilous journey to maturity. In December 1973 a fire from the dump was blown into the school plantation, destroying a quarter of an acre of trees, and snow also caused some damage in 1976 and 1996. In 1978 the bluegum plantation was felled and in 1984 an area of native trees and shrubs was established beside the oval.

Of all the endeavours Dave Adams shared with the Rakaia School community during the time he was Principal, one of the things he remains proudest of is the establishment of the native planting section. The finished

project was a credit to the school, community, and the pupils themselves who did much of the hard work in establishing the fine well-grown native ecosystem students now enjoy. The grove was initially set around two shallow pools to encourage the birds to drink and scatter seed.

The pools have gone and the Kauri did not survive, but twelve years later the grove has grown into a fine stand. The tallest trees are now 12 - 20 feet high; cabbage trees, manuka, golden totara, and pittosporum provide a good backdrop to the smaller plantings of flax, 5 finger, kowhai, and many other trees and shrubs. A garden of azaleas and rhododendrons established over the last few years offer a blaze of colour to the main entrance and work continues on a landscaping plan to update and integrate the schoolground plantings.



The Native Garden.

## *The Snow of '96*





# *Rakaia* –

## **The First 25 Years before the School, 1847 - 1872**

The history of Rakaia must of course begin at the river. The Rakaia River was the great pathway across to the West Coast and the greenstone deposits around the Taramakau River. It was also the great obstacle on the East Coast track linking the Maori Settlements in the South Island.

The Maori moa hunters set fires to the great tussock plains of Canterbury and, aided by the fierce nor'west winds, were able to flush out the huge birds from their natural habitats. The remains of these feasts have been found in diggings in the Canterbury area.

There is no known evidence of a permanent Maori settlement on the Rakaia River, the nearest being at Taumutu on Lake Ellesmere where the fishing was easier and more rewarding.

With the arrival of the European settlers to the Lyttelton Harbour and Banks Peninsula areas in the 1830's the face of the country began to change. There were large areas of native forests around Little River with large stands of rimu, totara and beech. This source of wood enabled the settlers to establish a sawmill and thus build their houses with fine long lasting timbers.



Crossing the Rakaia, 1856.

From an original painting by Cecil Kelly of Robert & Elizabeth Smith on their way to Mount Peel. The bullock driver is John Duncan.



Early maps show the Rakaia River with other names. An Admiralty map of 1838 shows it as ORAKAIA and some other maps used by the Canterbury Provincial Council show it by the name of CHOLMONDOLEY. However, by 1850 the name was firmly Rakaia.

The river crossings determined the site for the Rakaia Township. The earliest crossing was generally at Wolseleys Road where there was a natural gap in the twenty foot terrace on the South Bank and this was also the narrowest part of the river. The road to this crossing came from Bankside and after the Rakaia River went straight to Ashburton via Dromore. These roads were surveyed two chain roads and still exist.

However, when the river was in any sort of flood this crossing became too deep and the travellers moved downstream. The two chain road was surveyed from the Selwyn River Giggs or Parlbys Hotel to run east of Bankside, past John Stubbs to a point about two kilometers east of the present railway. Here William Dunford built an accommodation house "Dunford's", sometimes called "The Southern Cross Hotel".

Dunford was previously the manager of Acton station and saw the need for accommodation on the Rakaia River. There had been many requests for a punt across the Rakaia River from 1853 and Dunford was granted a license for his premises in 1855.

The conditions for the license were firmly laid down that the licensee must have a room for a bar and a separate room for ladies. The licensee must provide single and double rooms for thirty persons and stable accommodation and feed for their horses. A light must be kept burning on a pole during the hours of darkness to guide travellers.

Dunford, of course, operated the river crossing with bullocks and drays and later with a large punt capable of carrying sheep and cattle as well as goods. This punt was secured to a rope between two piles and pulled across by horses pulling a rope through a pulley system. Frequent floods made this operation precarious and dangerous. Many persons were drowned using this crossing.

Sheep and cattle were normally driven across the river at low water. Drovers at this crossing were John Duncan and Davey Duncan, early residents of Rakaia. Also Flowers and Brown worked for Dunford and then took over the accommodation house. Then they built another one on the South Side in 1864 which lined up with the "Old Main South Road". This building was known as "Browns".

"Dunfords" was taken over in 1868 by Geo. Robinson and already plans were being made to build a bridge across the Rakaia. By 1869 the route for the south railway line was fixed. This line was to cross the river where the terrace was about 9 feet high thus eliminating the need for a cutting and also protecting the structure and approaches from flooding.



The combined Road & Rail Bridge, 1872-1939.

Settlers on the south side in the Ashburton County vehemently opposed the bridge project. Many letters to the editor of "The Press" were written for some months beginning in April 1871 when William White erected his first bridge and began charging tolls for every crossing, man or beast. Geo. Gould was a prominent farmer and opponent of this scheme.

This first bridge was built of steel pipes driven into the river bed and a frame of steel pipes and wooden ties enabled travellers to cross on this flimsy structure, even carrying coaches and wagons. The designs for the new bridge were submitted and included some very elaborate and modern large spans. These proved too costly, estimated at up to 150,000 pounds and finally the contract was awarded to William White who had the experience of building the wooden bridge over the Waimakariri.

The contract for the new bridge was for a wooden bridge 4480 feet (68 chains) long and 17.5 feet wide. The contract was for 21,500 pounds but with the alterations and further provisions for the railway the final price was 34,350 pounds.

The bridge was opened for traffic in October 1872 and the rails were laid to Rakaia and opened for trains on 30th May, 1873. After two disastrous floods in 1873 and 1874 the bridge was lengthened to 88 chains, completed in 1875.

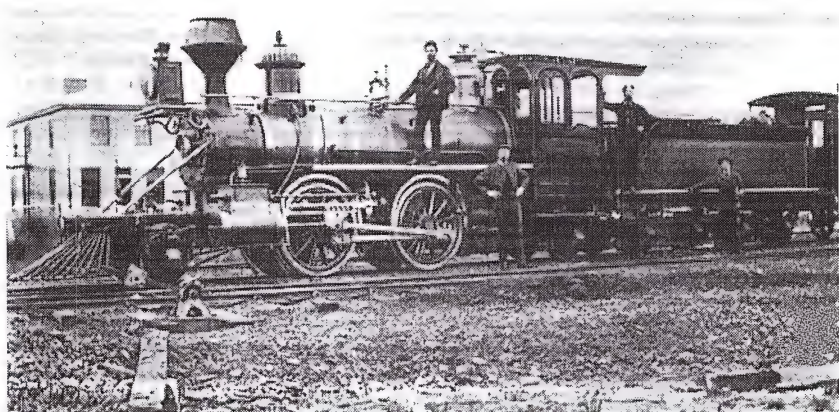
Leonard White, the builder's son and overseer, lived at the north end of the bridge. Timber for the long spans was VDL hardwood imported from Australia and the cross timbers were totara from the forests around Little River. This timber was floated across Lake Ellesmere and thence drawn by bullock wagons to Rakaia on Knyvetts Road.

With the pipe bridge operating in February 1871, suddenly the need for "Dunford's" accommodation House ceased. It was most unfortunately burned down on the 10th February 1871 due to unknown causes but fanned by a real nor'wester. Nothing was saved. It was perhaps fortunate that it was insured for 800 pounds, the exact amount spent to build the South Rakaia Hotel.

Rakaia became a hive of industry. The rail was pushed south to Ashburton at 3 feet 6 inches and Holmes & Co. was given the contract to relay the rails back to Christchurch at the new gauge. The old Pilgrim train from Lyttelton to Christchurch to Rakaia was a 5 foot 3 inch gauge and for a while this necessitated a change of trucks and bogies at Rakaia for further travel south. Altogether, a rail terminal and a busy town showed a great promise for the future in 1872.

With the spanning of the Rakaia River in 1872, the opening up of the settlement of Rakaia township began. The Provincial Council set about building schools throughout the province.

The Rakaia School was completed in March 1872 and it is recorded that the school painters were accommodated at the still unfinished South Rakaia Hotel. At this time the Central Government had taken over all the Provinces and Railways and had settled on a 3 foot 6 inch gauge standard for New Zealand Railways.



K95 Roger Locomotive, used on the first Express from Christchurch to Dunedin, 1878.



## *The Blacksmiths Shops*

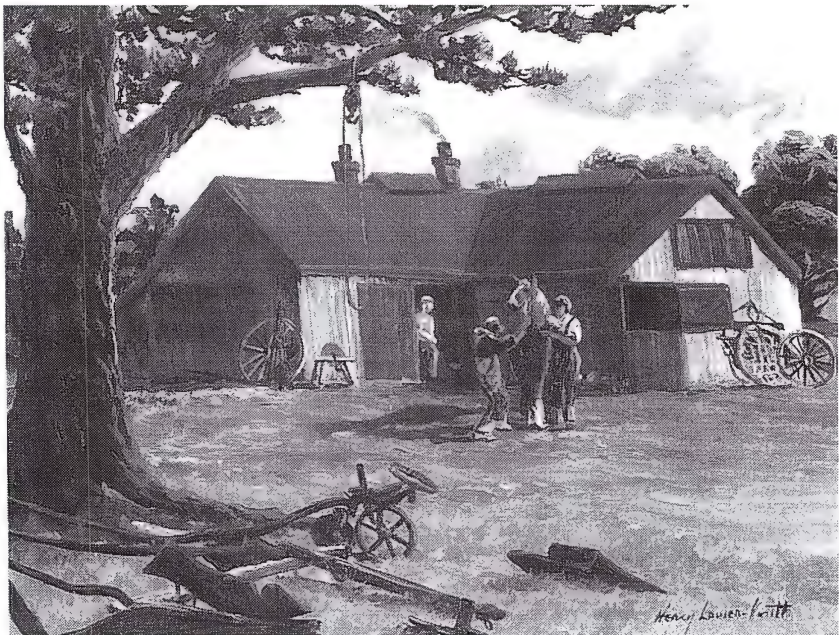
The first blacksmith to establish his business in Rakaia was Mr. William Bruce. He had come to Rakaia in the early 1870's and built his blacksmith shop at 74 Elizabeth Avenue (next to Burrowes Garage site). He had built for Mr. Lake a house at 90 Elizabeth Avenue (Jim Taylors) from a prefabricated kitset imported from the U.S.A. This house was assembled with wooden pegs and few nails. Blacksmithing was the major industry in that era of horse drawn vehicles with the ability to work forged steel. Bruce had learned his trade in Scotland and also had a great knowledge of animals gleaned from his days as a shepherd in the highlands. The business prospered and at its prime employed 11 men in the blacksmith shop. He was a careful Scot and became a stalwart member of the Rakaia Presbyterian Church serving as its Treasurer in 1879 with the first decision to build a manse on five acres purchased from Acton Station. This first manse was built on the Old Main South Road near the already established vicarage (Jim Mead's). The house was sold to Jim Brown in 1912 when the new manse was built. William Bruce had two daughters who also supported the church and Miss R. Bruce is recorded as organist in 1886 and Miss Ellen Bruce was a member of the choir. Older Rakaia residents recall in later years Miss Ellen wending her way up the aisle being careful to avoid hitting the kerosene lamps hanging there. Large and tall hats were the order of the day and Miss Bruce would walk first to the left and then to the right of those swinging lamps. William Bruce's business prospered and the canny Scot built a new villa house at 76 Elizabeth Avenue and continued the business next door until well after the turn of the century. When he retired from active blacksmithing he spent his later years as a drover. He was frequently away for long periods and when he returned the dogs always welcome the homecoming to Miss Bruce. About 1935 the house was sold to William Bethune, also a Scot, a shepherd and a drover. Nothing changed in its use. The Smithy had been dismantled when Mr. Bruce retired but Bethune kept the sheds and the dog kennels at the rear of the house. When Mr. Bethune died, the house was sold to Eric Stone and remained in his possession until he retired to Ashburton about 1975. The house was then demolished.

So ended the first era of the Smithy.

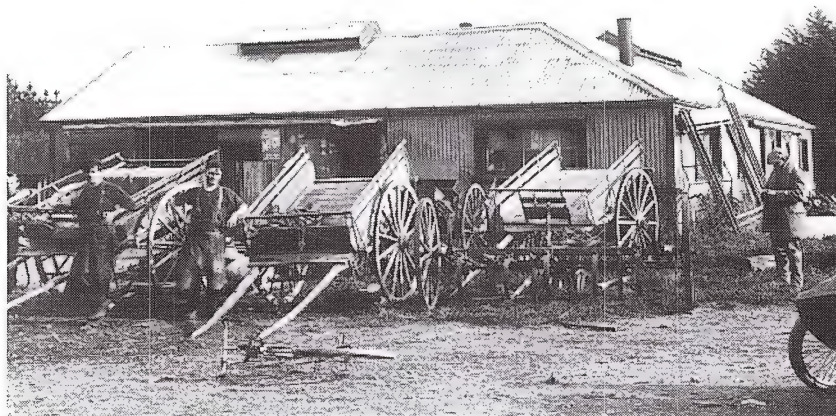
The second blacksmith to build in Rakaia was William Cromie. He had come to New Zealand from County Down in Northern Ireland as a small boy in 1864. His father, a farmer and blacksmith, settled in Cust and built his blacksmith's shop on the main road there and his house beside it. Wm. Cromie Snr. had a large family and each of the boys in turn learned their trade in the family smithy and as a new son joined the firm, the older one moved off to work elsewhere as a farmer or blacksmith. William Cromie Jnr. moved first to Rangiora and then, when he married, moved to Rakaia with his wife and began work with

Mr. Bruce. He soon built his own house at 90 Bowen Street and a new smithy on the corner of Bowen and Chapman Streets and began business on his own account. He owned all the block of land of his Smithy and Cromie's Garage excepting the Railway Reserve (Rakaia Marine now). Also the block where Tom Cromie lived and the block where Demeter Pacific are now. Sections were sold at fifty pounds for each quarter acre so times must have been relatively prosperous for tradesmen then. Other Cromie boys from Cust opened blacksmith shops at Wakanui, Balfour and Kingsdown. All these were sold and the proceeds directed to buying farms. John Cromie, blacksmith from Wakanui, became a schoolteacher at Winchmore and even later became a doctor in London. William Cromie and his wife both died in their early 40s and left a young family of seven to fend for themselves. Eldest son William was just old enough to continue the blacksmith's shop and employed George and Tom to help. When William married Hannah McKenzie, a Rakaia Salvation Army lassie from Inverell in New South Wales, George moved on and joined the Police Force in Wellington. This was short lived as he married a divorced woman, a barmaid from Barretts Hotel, and was dismissed from the Police Force.

George returned to Rakaia with his new wife and began work in the smithy with brother Bill again. He soon built a new house in Fergusson Street and decided that there was a future for him in the new-fangled motor car. The new



Bill Cromie's Blacksmith Shop, 1895.



W. J. Lee's Blacksmith Shop, in the 1930's.

wife could not see her future in Rakaia as it was a totally different life to the one she had enjoyed in Wellington. Just too great a change! He employed Packer & Jones of Christchurch to build a new brick garage next to the smithy for 1400 pounds and opened for business in 1914. There were only two motor cars in Rakaia at that time. Tom Cromie continued to work in the Smithy for brother Bill until he subsequently took on shearing. Employees at the Smithy in the 1920's were George Walker, nicknamed "Carson", and in the 1930's Bill Columbus.

Bill Cromie retired from the Smithy about 1953 and the business closed. The building was used by Alan Thompson to first establish a panel repair and jet boat business and with further extensions the silo and engineering business now operated by Rakaia Engineering Ltd. (John Kuyf).

The third blacksmith shop was built on the corner of Railway Terrace East and Fergusson Street. William Harvey was the blacksmith and continued there until he sold to William Lee. Bill Lee and Tom Gaylor operated the business together and when Lee retired he sold the business to Tom Gaylor.

Tom Gaylor and Bob Grigg worked together until Bob decided to give up the trade and go shearing. Tom then took on Graham Pluck in the smithy but in the shakedown of the blacksmith's business Tom retired and Graham took over, turning a failing smithy into a general engineering shop.

This proved a most successful move and resulted in the purchase of the large Farmers Co-op shed across the road and its subsequent expansion into the design and building of agricultural engineering. Irrigation and effluent spray equipment is now manufactured and sold all over New Zealand and Australia.

A notable son of this Mr. Harvey, blacksmith, was Peter Harvey who was picked as an All Black half back for the 1905 team but did not go with the team.



## *Butchers & Bakers Shops*

The first butcher's shop was built for Messrs. Chamberlain and Hartwell in 1874. This was a wooden building of colonial cottage design with a verandah across the front. The bakery retail shop was at the north end of the shop and deliveries of bread and meat were made using special two wheeled carts with an enclosed box and doors at the rear. The meat was cut off as desired at the gate of the housewife and the bread taken from a side door up front. The business had up to three delivery carts and was a thriving business.

The bakery was situated at 13 Elizabeth Avenue and a shop was built out the front with its frontage right on the footpath and a verandah over the footpath.

Mr. W. H. Breach took over the combined business in 1878 and operated it until forced by ill health to retire. He sold the business to William Strachan. The bakery site was sold to Philip Laraman in 1879 and to George Murray in 1880. The bakery building at the rear of Murray's shop was constructed of cavity concrete walls 12" thick, two stories high with a loft for the storage of flour. The large oven had walls three feet thick lined with fire bricks and was fired by wood slabs up to four feet long. In later years the oven was converted to oil firing in Howard Freer's time.

Sydney Breach returned from South Africa about 1910 after staying on in that country after the Boer War. Geo. Murray had died and Syd married Edith Murray and took over the bakery business.



W. Strachan's Butcher & Baker Shop, 1900.



Harry Craig's Shop, 1960.

The old wooden butcher and baker's shop had burned down about 1904 and a new brick building was erected on the site complete with new baker's ovens and cool room. These ovens were never used and the bakery business was supplied from the Elizabeth Avenue bakery. Mr. Strachan continued the retail business until it was sold to Billy Black. Then the retail bakery was owned by Frank Kennett, next Sid Bryant, Howard Freer and Ted Archer. All these bakers supplied their shop from the old bakery.

The butcher's shop passed from Strachan to Billy Black and then at the early part of World War II to Joe Johnston. Joe had developed a thriving butchery supplying Army Camps at Burnham, Rakaia and Winchmore - the shop being manned by his daughters Dina and Bertha till the war ended. When Harry Craig returned from the war Joe Johnston sold him the business on a promise he had made to keep the business for him till after the war. Howard Freer took over the bakery from his uncle Sid Bryant and ran the business till Trevor Archer bought it in 1953. Howard Freer's mother had worked the retail bakery since Sid Bryant took over in 1928. Sid Bryant's wife was a noted singer who performed at many concerts in Rakaia and elsewhere.

Trevor Archer carried on until he retired and the shops were closed, being overtaken by the supermarket deliveries of bread and the opening of a new butchers shop in the block built on Elizabeth Avenue.

Strachan's butcher's shop was leased by Thomas Lucas from 1st March 1910 until he sold the lease in June 1911 when he returned to farming.

Thomas Lucas was the son of Welsh parents, born in Papanui, educated at Papanui and Dunsandel School from which he left at Std. 3 to work on a baker's van delivering bread as far south as Rakaia. His uncle Geo. took him aged 12 years to work as a junior teamster on Henry Harrison's farm Hollyfort where he

himself was head teamster. In 1898 Thomas married, and they shifted to Tinwald, then Hampstead while Thomas worked for 9d per hour handling bricks while building in Fairfield Freezing Works.

In 1899 he moved to Rakaia to work on a butcher's cart, back farming for a short time before leasing Strachan's shop. After a short time farming at Bennetts near Oxford they finally returned as a married couple at "Wingfield" where they remained till he leased Berry farm from his uncle Geo. in 1925 - this farm was bequeathed to Thomas and he remained there till his death in 1932.

### **Other Butchers' Shops in Rakaia**

Alf Santy persuaded Walter Dunstan to put up the money and go into partnership in a butchers shop about 1920 and they opened for business in the front of a house opposite the South Rakaia Hotel.

Walter Dunstan was a harvesting contractor and operated a large traction engine combine, chaff cutter and stinky often seen as the wagon train about the Ashburton County.

Dunstan had the money and Santy had the experience. He was a butcher at Fairfield Freezing Works. The business closed during the depression, it being said that Santy then had the money and Dunstan had the experience. The house and shop burned down about 1932.

Another butcher's shop to open was begun in Hardy's yard building (now W. Tomlin) by Louis Tremayne. He had worked for Billy Black and decided to go it alone. This business was short-lived, about two years, and closed about 1935, the building then being used by Eric Hunter, shoe repairer.



Walter Dunstan's Threshing Mill and Chaff Cutting Plant.



# Garages

The first motor garage built in Rakaia was built by George Cromie in 1914. George had learned his early engineering skills in brother Bill's blacksmith shop along with Tom. The Cromie boys were left to run the smithy in 1906 when the father died aged 46 yrs. Ann recalls the doctor operating on the kitchen table but peritonitis was invariably fatal and William died a few days later. George recognised the role the motor car would play in the future of transport and decided to build a new motor garage in Rakaia. He bought the land next to the Smithy and engaged Packer and Jones of Armagh Street, Christchurch to erect a big brick building. This was completed for the sum of 1400 pounds. There were only two cars in the Rakaia District at that time so Mr. Harry Harrison drove to Rakaia and the turning circle of the car's steering was established. This was the determining factor of the size of the building, 60 feet wide, 90 feet long. The floor was equipped with a wooden turntable. A lathe was purchased in the U.S.A., a West Bend from Indiana, and a large drill. This machinery was driven by overhead shafts and belts all powered by a single cylinder oil engine of a type used by shearing stands. Lighting throughout the building was obtained by manufacturing acetylene gas in a plant at the rear of the garage and piping throughout the building with an impressive gas lamp illuminating the imposing brick front entrance.



G. Cromie's Garage, 1914.



Rakaia Transport Service Station, 1934.  
H. Hopwood.

The garage business quickly grew but in 1916 George was called up by conscription to the army and had to leave the garage in the care of brother Tom and Carson (Geo. Walker). George transferred to the Air Force and at the Canterbury Flying School learned to be a pilot in the Caudron biplane and Bleriot monoplane that were the flying machines of the day. George displayed a great talent as an engineer in working with those old rotary Gnome engines and was retained by the Canterbury Flying School as an engineer and pilot instructor till the war ended.

Back home in Rakaia, George took over the garage business again and was joined by his brother Harry in the garage business. This then became Cromie Bros. Harry had been employed by the N.Z. Loan and Mercantile Co. and had learned the office skills and routines necessary to run a business. The business prospered until the great depression of 1929 - 35. Farmers could not pay and almost all of the assets and money in the business were lost. Harry took over the business in 1936 and with some help from tyre companies and oil companies in the nature of deferred credit was able to continue. With the building of the two bridges over the Rakaia River to replace the combined road/rail bridge, Rakaia township began to prosper. Cromie Bros. had the contract to repair all of the trucks and provide all the petrol and tyres for the Rope Construction Co. This spending, initiated by the Labour Government in 1936, began the recovery of New Zealand. World prices were recovering and so did Cromie's Garage.

In early 1939, Harry Cromie bought a new 1938 Chevrolet De Luxe for 325 pounds. This served as a taxi for 14 years right throughout the war and the years of shortages after.

The garage was destroyed by fire at 6 p.m. on 24th June, 1947, and everything in it was lost - four cars, 2 trucks and a tractor - but the billiard room next door was saved. Cleaning up the site was prevented the next day by a fall of snow 6" deep. Plans to re-roof the brick building immediately were thwarted when a 90 m.p.h. wind blew it down.

This 'Act of God' pointed the way of the future and plans were put in train to shift to the Main Highway next to Mead's Tea Rooms. The corner section was purchased from Mrs Mead and plans were submitted to build the new Service Station (American style).

Garages were not considered a priority and building consent was held up until October 1949. The new building was finished and opened for the Xmas trade of 1949 - four pumps and four brands of petrol.

There was a great criticism of the move from the centre of Rakaia to "down by the riverbed". The old garage site is now part of John Kuyf's silo factory.

The new Bridge Street Garage and Service Station was opened for Harry and Laurie Cromie and from 1950 supplied a service to motorists, gradually extending from the Monday to Friday, to a six day and then finally a seven day operation. Laurie's retirement in 1987 saw the garage sold to David and Kaye Chapman who have again modernised the building to suit the present day marketing requirements.

The second garage in Rakaia was opened by Jack Allen in Bowen Street. Jack had operated a bicycle repair shop in Elizabeth Avenue and about 1930 decided to move into the motor repair business. He purchased land in Bowen Street from Jack Pye and built a large galvanised iron shed and installed four pumps at the front. Jack Allen was a bachelor and lived at the rear of the garage in its early years of operation.

By 1938 he had prospered enough to build a new frontage onto the older shed and present a new appearance. This was an Art Deco design with rounded corners and provided cover over the pumps. He also extended the rear of the shed to double its size. He employed Billy Rapley as mechanic and then an office girl. His first apprentice, Des Tully, started work there about 1939 followed by Edgar Dent in 1944. Edgar purchased shares in the business and worked with Jack Allen in partnership as Allen's Garage Ltd.

When Edgar retired from the business it was sold to Gluyas Motors who employed Trevor Hyde as manager and operator. The business was next sold to Ben van Pelt who bought Bailey's Garage on the Main Highway and closed the Jack Allen Garage. The building was used for a short time as a Panel and Paint business and sold again. It is mostly used for storage now.



The third garage, Rakaia Transport Service, is included here, although it was just a Service Station. It was built in 1931 on the corner of Rolleston and Bridge Street (No. 33) and initially Harry Hopwood intended to service his own transport trucks. When the Main Highway was diverted down Bridge Street suddenly he was called on to service the travelling public. With backing from Texaco, two pumps were installed and a range of oil dispensers. Texaco pumps in those days were rather special being double headers, each bowl dispensing six gallons of petrol, Texaco or Texaco Power Chief. Being called out at night encouraged Harry to build a lean-to onto the original building and he employed Jack Laraman to sleep on the premises and service the passing cars. This was one of the first twenty four hour service stations. Pressure from the price-cutting in the depression compelled him to quit the service station and leave it to Frank Wilson to supply the public.

Harry Hopwood had built his new brick house behind the Service Station and it was most modern being faced with brown coloured sand from Moeraki Beach. Harry then began his taxi business and rental cars from the rear of that quarter acre section. He owned a Hudson motor car that would carry eight persons and his rental car was a 1936 Ford V8. This car proved too powerful for most of the lads who hired it and was frequently rolled and repaired. Altogether a frustrating type of business. His taxi driver in those early years was Mona Carmichael, just a slip of a girl, hardly big enough to see over the wheel of the Hudson! Mona worked as an all-purpose assistant to Mr. Hopwood, just doing what had to be done in all his various demands. She left when the Bridge building was finished to marry Bert Subritsky and moved back to shipping on the Hokianga Harbour, founding the Subritsky Shipping Company. This Company has flourished in its new role of providing the Waikeke Island Vehicle Ferry and also several ships and barges servicing all the Islands that abound in Northland and the Hauraki Gulf.

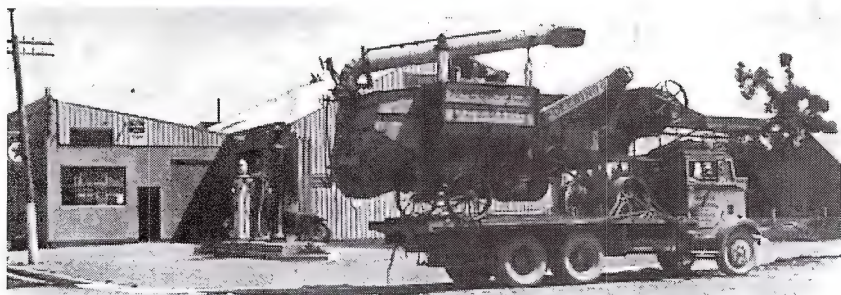
The fourth garage in Rakaia was built on the Main Highway (Bridge Street) about 1934. Frank Wilson and his brother, Alf had been repairing cars in the shed on his father's farm in Hardys Road for some time and decided to take the big step and build a new concrete garage of modern design. The Main Highway had just been diverted down Bridge Street to a new road cut through Jack Gardiner's paddock to join the Old Main South Road at Jack Gardiner's gate. The road to Ashburton had just been reformed and was scheduled for tarsealing. This new route through Rakaia cut out six right-angled corners and two bends necessary to proceed south through Rakaia. Of course it also cut off the South Rakaia Hotel and Cromie's Garage and presented a new opportunity for Wilson's Garage. (Frank Wilson was an early customer for the cut price imported Russian petrol imported by Todd Bros (later Europa) and enjoyed the boost that lower prices brought about. This, of course, resulted in a price war where all the garages were in danger of going broke and ultimately in the Labour Government intervention by fixing wholesale and retail prices in 1937.

When the war came in 1939, Frank Wilson was young enough to be called up in the Army in 1942 when New Zealand required every available man in the armed forces. Billy Rowe went into the Air Force as did Milner Doig and Frank had to leave the garage in the hands of a manager. After the war Frank took over again, Milner Doig rejoined the staff and they continued to operate the business until Frank retired in 1963 and sold the business to C.E. Bailey Ltd. Milner had left the business with his untimely early death. Baileys operated the business until selling out in 1986 to Ben van Pelt. He combined his two garages and consolidated on the Main South Road site currently operated by Rodger Burrowes. The engine and repair shop was sold to Murray Smith separately.

The list of garages is not complete without recording the business of Carol Christopher David Wilkie. Carl Wilkie, as he was known in Rakaia, had built his galvanised iron shed on the corner of Michael and Bridge Streets. He was a Scotsman from Auchtermuchty and retained his broad Scottish accent and by that became quite a well-known character in Rakaia. He usually worked by himself and was generally fixing all the difficult engines on trucks and tractors. He became an expert in servicing Bulldog Lanz single cylinder diesel tractors. He would rebore the cylinder in his lathe and after assembly leave the tractor at a fast idle to run in the piston and rings. The signature sound of a Bulldog Tractor is always to be remembered.

The children who lived nearby were the only children in New Zealand who, when asked what sort of a noise a tractor makes would reply "bump, bump, bump, bump".

Carl Wilkie was an enthusiastic supporter of boxing and would travel long distances with Jim Blackley to follow the boxing circuit. Carl was not one to keep his workshop particularly tidy but his workshop got its much needed coat of paint when the Queen was to drive past in 1953. When Carl got married and went on his honeymoon his friends came around and painted the house as a present to his new bride.

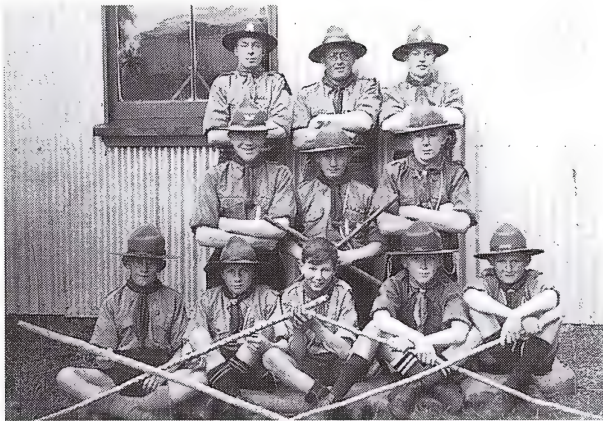


Leyland Cub with "Tin Mill" outside Wilson's Garage, Rakaia.

# Scouts

The Rakaia Scout Group was begun by Les Hopwood about 1st July, 1931. The first meetings were held in the rear of Hardy's Store in the big shed known as Middleton's Store. This store had been shifted to its Rakaia site from the north side of the Rakaia River as soon as the bridge was completed in 1873 and became part of the Hardy's yard complex of buildings. Scout meetings were held every Friday night attended by about 16 boys. The Scout Committee decided that it would build a Scout Hall and land was bought at Elizabeth Avenue and cleared of trees. The trees were sold and the timber for the new hall bought from the proceeds and from a donation from Jack Gardiner. Les Hopwood was an extremely strong and capable young man from working on his father's transport trucks. He led the building team to erect the new Scout Hall assisted by Ted Henderson and senior scouts, Gordon Conway and Russel Kenward. The other scouts all assisted and soon the hall was finished, size about 20 x 40 metres.

The Scout group grew in size and an extension was built on the rear south end to provide four small rooms, one for each patrol and one for the Scoutmaster. The Scout group had by now grown to about 20 boys, six in each patrol. Senior boys' camps were held at Mayfield and the Scouts were able to enjoy weekend camps at Bill Cromie's hut at the beach. Several boys would also go off for weekend camps on their bicycles to the Ashburton River or Selwyn Huts taking tents and billies and all the essentials for a three day camp.



Rakaia Scouts, 1937.

Back Row: Gordon Conway, Les Hopwood, Russell Kenward.

Middle Row: Eric Cromie, Norman Greenaway, Barney Cromie.

Front Row: Harold Conway, Bill O'Connor, Bill Columbus, Laurie Cromie, Trevor Mead.



Les Hopwood was an able gymnast and taught the boys the gymnastics of the rings, horizontal bar and parallel bars. Boxing and wrestling were performed amid the wood shavings on the floor. The shavings were in abundant supply from Ashfords every Friday Scout night.

The Scouts continued until the great fire of 1947 destroyed the Town Hall, picture theatre and Pyes Stores. The Scout Hall was sold to Mr. Carlton who built a new extension on the rear and the tall structure at the front to house the projection box. The Scouts were in recess then until enough money was raised to build the new Scout Den on Railway Terrace West. The timber was given by Mr. Graham Holmes and the building completed about 1950.

The Scout Committee was at this time fortunate to have many strong supporters and potential leaders, probably a legacy from the pre-war Scout troop.

Fred Allan and Jack Street became the new Leaders and started a small troop of about eight scouts. Scout nights had been held previously in the old Court House and St. Marks Sunday School but with the new "Scout Den" numbers of boys increased and interest was generated so that soon thirty Scouts and 25 Cubs were attending on their meeting nights. Under the leadership of Carlene Dunlea, the Cubs too soon became more than one pack would allow and another pack was formed. Assistants then were Rona Pluck, Len Cockburn, Mr. & Mrs Claude Taylor, Joy Pluck, and Margaret Ansell.

The Guides and Brownies used the new Scout Den. Also established at this time was a troop of Venturer Scouts and the need was felt for more facilities at the "Den". The Bankside Railway Station was purchased and brought to Rakaia on a Mid-Canterbury Transport truck and placed at the north end of the new "Den". Money was raised by means of a 'bag drive', a 'bottle drive' and the real money spinner, two acres of potatoes planted and harvested in a different farm every year. The funds raised in this manner were used to complete the extensions and for purposes of general goodwill projects related to the scouts.

Venturer Scouts were assisted with expenses to go to jamborees in Greece, Fiji, Australia and Western Samoa and Scouts to jamborees at various cities in New Zealand. Some money was given to bring scouts from Samoa and Fiji to jamborees in New Zealand. Among the Scoutmasters were Norman Ellens and Graham Lister, Don Fraser and Darryl Nelson. John Lawler was the Venturer Scout Leader.

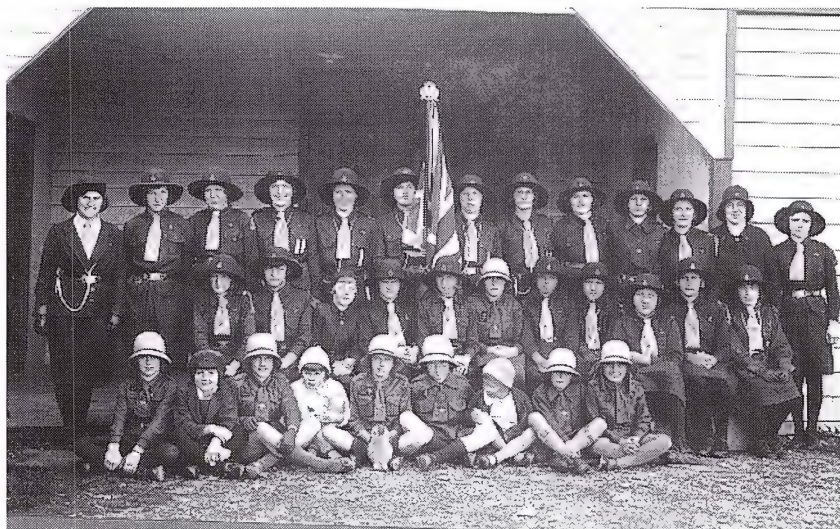
## *Guides*

The first Rakaia Girl Guide Company is recorded from 7th December, 1931. Among the first girls enrolled were Nellie Tatterson, Hazel and Beulah McGeorge, Ivy and Daisy Shellock, Betty Cornelius and others. Soon more girls joined, Lily Pye and Gwen Lee. Christmas that year saw a large church parade and by February the Rakaia G.G. Company was represented at a Founders Day Service in Christchurch by 24 Guides and eleven Brownies.

In 1932 Vera Fox, captain, appointed Ina Cornelius as lieutenant. In July the Guides attended the Scouts' first birthday party in the Methodist Church. The sports afternoon was followed by a supper and social evening. 1933 saw the departure of Vera Fox to South Africa and the appointment of Ina Cornelius as captain was confirmed. Edna Kidd was appointed librarian and added this to her considerable skill as a pianist.

After this time, the meetings were generally held in the Anglican Sunday School Hall as the numbers grew too large. The names of the Guide and Brownie packs included Keruru and Fantail.

An early member of the guides, Carlene Dunlea, proved to be a long term stalwart of the movement and stayed as a leading figure of the Guides, Scouts, Brownies and Cubs for the many subsequent years.



Rakaia Girl Guides and Brownies, 1933, with their captain, Ina Cornelius.

# *Railway*



The first Railway Station was built in 1872 on the east side of the Railway opposite Rolleston Street, and on the west side the goods shed was erected. On the extension of the Railway to Ashburton and Timaru, it was decided to make Rakaia a crossing place for North and South Bound Trains so a new Railway Station was erected with a two sided platform situated opposite Bowen Street, and the Main Central Railway crossing joined the Methven Road (Elizabeth Avenue) to Bowen Street (then the Main South Road for one block). The Railway Station was a spacious building with a Main Office, Parcel Office, Luggage Room, Parcel Room and a Ladies' Rest room with a cosy open fire, leather bound chairs and forms, and toilets. Later on, the Station had a verandah fitted on

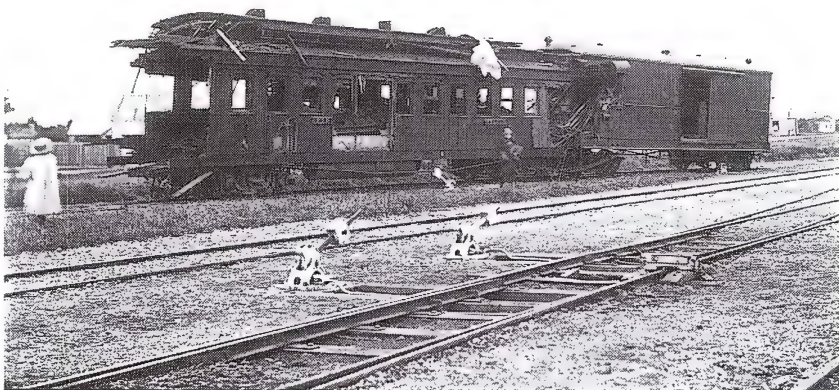
both sides of the main building affording more shelter from the rain.

The opening of the Branch line to Methven in 1878 by the Rakaia and Ashburton Forks Railway Co. gave a further boost to the development of Rakaia. The store on Bowen Street was built in 1882 (now Rakaia Marine) and the early 1870's saw the Bank of Australasia erect their small office in Rolleston Street (Kenwards, McCoys) with two more shops nearby. One was used by a photographer, Matt Shaw, and the other by Mr Barlow, Saddlery and leather goods. Mr Middleton built a new store and also shifted his old store from North Rakaia to the site behind, opposite the new N.Z. Loan and Mercantile Store (1875). The Butcher and Baker Shop opened in 1874 and the Railway Hotel in 1883. Soon after the establishment of the new branch Line to Methven, the Town Hall and the Post and Telegraph Office were built alongside the stationmasters' house, and next to the Court House and Oddfellows Lodge. Another lodge building was erected next to Pluck's Store and near Cromie's Blacksmith Shop. The Library was built on the corner of Mackie Street and





North Rakaia Railway Accident, 1907.



Rakaia Railway Accident, 11th March, 1899.

West Railway Terrace. All this took place in the 10 years after the school opened in 1872. All clustered about the railway.

The railway brought about a new degree of ease of travel to Christchurch and Ashburton, one and a half hours to Christchurch, there and back in one day, a great change from a three day journey behind a bullock team and dray. The American Rogers K88 locomotive was fast and strong and suited the Canterbury Plains. The same company (Rogers) built two more engines for the Methven Branch line. They were Q Class 2-4-4 Locomotives named "Stanley" and "Livingston".

Regular outings were organized for rail trips and it was after one such picnic that the great Rakaia Rail accident occurred on 11 March 1899. A picnic train carrying a full load of passengers from Timaru stopped at Rakaia to wait for a southbound express to cross over. A following picnic excursion train failed to see that the train was stopped and in inclement weather, south west wind and rain, it crashed into the rear of the first train telescoping the guards' van and rear carriages. Four persons were killed and forty injured. This accident resulted in an extensive overhaul of the Railway signalling system and the introduction of the Tablet release system. No train could be on the same stretch of line without first inserting a tablet into a control machine. This however did not prevent another accident north of the Rakaia Bridge on 30 March 1907 when two trains collided head on. One was a troop train, and several horses were killed but

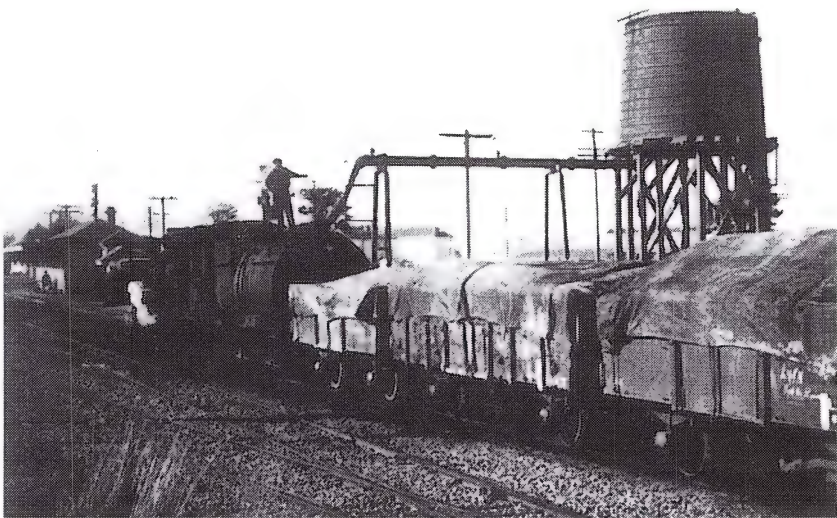


Rakaia Railway Station.

fortunately no persons were in the front horse boxes. The drivers jumped clear before the accident.

The railways were an important part of the Rakaia scene. In its heyday there were 6 express trains and 7 goods trains every day, some of which also carried passengers. The Rakaia platform was the central meeting place for Rakaia, specially at 6.30 pm when the boat train crossed the Ashburton train and dispatched the evening train to Methven.

The Railway to Methven closed in 1976 beaten by the increasing use of trucks for the transport of goods. Finally the railway system was streamlined, train control was carried out from Christchurch, all by computers. Diesel locomotives could pull a greater load and therefore there were fewer trains. The passing bay at Rakaia was itself bypassed. The station was demolished and the rails were torn up and sold. Only the main line remains.



AB Engine at Water Tank, Rakaia, 1936.

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*I remember . . .*

The lights of Wellington as the "Wahine" sailed.

The blaze of sky-rockets in Hagley Park.



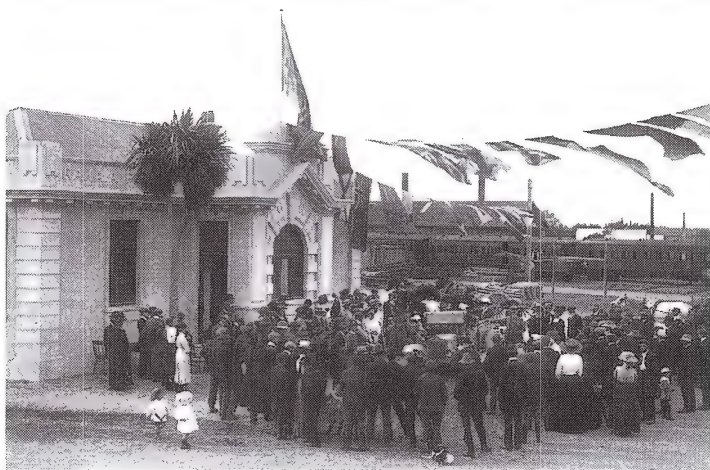
## *Post Office*

The first Post Office was opened in Dunford's Accomodation House on the North Bank of the River on 1st May, 1858. This was to service the fortnightly mail service between Christchurch and Timaru and functioned in a somewhat unofficial capacity until it was confirmed with the appointment of Charles Flowers, ferryman, as the Postmaster North Rakaia on 1st July, 1863. William Dunford took over this position in 1870 as a permanent office but it closed February 1871, perhaps as a result of the fire and subsequent shift of the Rakaia settlement to South Rakaia.

John Brown also operated the Rakaia (South Bank) Post Office from 1863 but Matthew Robson was appointed in 1865 as Postmaster South Rakaia. The Post Office was located next in the small Railway Station East Side in 1872 and then in the postmaster's house in Railway Terrace East. This house was later removed to Robinson Street (C. B. Currey's) to make way for the new postmaster's house.

About 1890 the Post Office was shifted again to the Oddfellows Lodge building attached to the Town Hall and became the Post and Telegraph Office. The Post Office purchased the library corner Site, shifted the library north along Mackie Street and erected a fine new modern building on the town square to open in 1910.

This building also housed the telephone exchange and telegraph equipment and served as a store for the line staff. The Post Office was closed in 1991 and is now operated as a small agency in the Rakaia Health Post and Photo Centre.

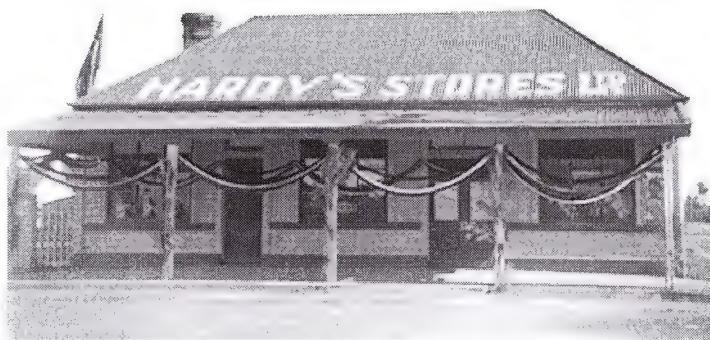


Rakaia Post Office, Opening Day, 1910.

## *Grocery Stores*

When the bridge across the Rakaia River was completed, the Rakaia Township sprang to life. David Middleton had operated a store on the North bank, and realizing that its useful days were numbered he shifted the building to Mackie Street corner and at the same time built a new store to front the new railway station and goods shed opposite. David Middleton was one of the earliest settlers in the Rakaia area having worked at Dunfords Accommodation House as a ferryman and later as the store keeper and postmaster. In 1879, he sold the South Rakaia Store to C. A. C. Hardy who had come to Rakaia from the West Coast goldfields. Hardy developed the store and built a new house in Hardys Road. He became a member of Parliament for Selwyn 1899-1911 and was succeeded by his son George Hardy in the Store. Hardy's Store became a central part of the Rakaia trade until it was sold to TH Green & Co. of Christchurch and managed by Arthur Mead until it was sold to Wally Bright. It was closed in 1973. Many of our present older generation will remember the extra efforts put on for the Xmas Celebrations.

The next grocery shop was established by Caleb Tucker on the Railway Terrace West, Bowen Street corner. Tucker had bought the Oddfellows Lodge and the Town Hall and built the two main buildings into one complex adding a supper room to the Town Hall and living quarters at the rear. An upstairs area was built and above the middle shop a large facade fronted the three buildings. This upstairs was furnished as living quarters and was occupied by the two



Hardy's Store, 1905.



Hardy's Store, 1905.

Salvation Army lassies stationed in Rakaia. This was in the era of a real attempt to bring prohibition into New Zealand, and after the suffragette movement had succeeded in 1893 giving women the vote. The Salvation Army lassies later occupied the living quarters at the rear of the Grocery Shop. Two of the Salvation Army lassies married Rakaia men. Hannah McKenzie from Inverell, Australia, married William Cromie, the blacksmith, and Nellie Metcalf married Bob Breach, footwear and clothing storekeeper.

Joshua Tucker had taken over the grocery business and later sold out to Jack Pye. The business then became known as Pyes Store. Jack Pye had married a Miss Bennington and after his wife's death remarried Ann Morey of Rakaia. He bought a new house about 1920 at 33 Bowen Street and raised his family of four children. His nephew, Ernie Pye, worked in the shop and drove the delivery van and from that skill went on to race cars and speed boats. Upon the death of Jack Pye the store was sold and operated by Alby Pope. Jack Pye had modernised the hall and Mrs. Pye further extended the Picture Theatre and it was indeed a blow to Rakaia when the whole complex was destroyed by fire in 1947. Many are the recollections of Father Xmas in the upstairs shop in the 1930's.

The upstairs shop had also seen other uses. Mr. Wilkie opened as a dentist in about 1928 and upon shifting his business to Ashburton sold his Rakaia operation to Renton Bell. This dentist carried on until Pye required the premises again so he moved to Christchurch. Until these two professional dentists came to Rakaia, most of the necessary dentistry was carried out by Frank Greenaway in the Tumble Inn Building, usually by a painful extraction. Frank Greenaway had brought home a war bride from England in 1918 and as a new arrival in Rakaia it was noted that as she walked she was slightly lame. She had a small





Pye's Store, 1925.



Pye's Store, 1930.

deformity in her foot. One of the local lads upon seeing her limping across the Railway Crossing asked who she was. "Oh! That's Frank Greenaway's new wife. She's out from England." "Well look at her, she's lame." Another wag, never short of an answer, said, "What does that matter? He's not going to race her!"

Greenaway's Shop, The Tumble Inn had to serve again as a grocery shop when the Town Hall was destroyed by fire. Mr. Claxton had to set up again and shortly after sold to Tom Cockburn. Tom in turn moved around to Rolleston Street beside McCoy's and Hardy's to get a better share of the business.

Other grocery shops also served Rakaia, Jack Anderson operated his business on the corner of Rolleston and Mackie Street and it was destroyed by fire about 1938.

Mr. C. W. Morgan had a grocery in the building next to the Farmers in 1902 and later right next door Elsie and Jack Bell ran a tearooms. Stella Brown (Archer) also ran the tearooms there during the early years of the war 1939. Walter Ashford started his woodworkers in the small building next to the Farmers about 1933 before he moved to the large building used by C. Pluck & Son (Rakaia Marine). Ashford had expanded his kit-set business and had a flourishing mail order operation selling seagrass stools, dolls prams, spinning wheels and children's cots and high chairs. Called for military service, he joined the Air Force and had to leave the business under the management of his father, the Rev Dudley Ashford. The business continued there for some years, finally closing at Rakaia to establish in Ashburton.

Another grocery shop was developed by the Farmers in the front of their big grain store on Railway Terrace. It employed Arthur Crossley as manager and Mr. Donaldson. Joe Sheehan, Noel Fox, Stan Duncan and Jean Breeding were among the staff who served there. The Farmers closed down the grocery as its trade declined and soon after sold the whole premises to Graham Pluck. He has built up a thriving engineering business in the large building serving the Rakaia farming community. Shopping late on Xmas Eve in the Farmers, Jack Street was looking for a Xmas present for his mother. There it was, new and gleaming- "A new handle for the axe!"



### *I remember . . .*

The 'big snow' of 1945.

The 'big blow' of 1975.

# Churches

The history of Rakaia is not complete without reference to the churches. They were responsible for the settlement of Canterbury with the arrival of the first four ships in Lyttelton about Christmas 1850. It was intended that Christchurch would be established as a colony in the best Christian tradition.

The Anglican Church was the prime mover and so it was proper that the first church in Rakaia was formed into a Parish on 11th September, 1876. The first services were held in the school, then, only one year old in 1873. The first clergyman was the Rev. T. H. Wills who came once a month from Ashburton, the other Sunday Services being taken by lay readers Norris and Mackie, early residents. The new church was opened in May 1877 and stood alone on an unfenced tussock paddock and subject to the elements of the Mid Canterbury weather. In 1880 the fierce nor-wester damaged the building and it had to be reinforced by the addition of flying buttresses and a new transept roof. By 1886 the church was also starting a Sunday School in the building opposite which had been moved to Rakaia from Rokeby.

The first vicarage was built on the Old Main South Road (Jim Mead's) and was used extensively for meetings and garden parties until the new vicarage was built in Cridland Street about 1914. It is said that the site for the new vicarage was quickly selected when the visiting Archbishop of New Zealand fell into the water race down near the Old Main South Road. It must have been a precipitous decision in 1913.



Anglican Church, 1907.



The Presbyterian Church in Rakaia was first mooted on 1875 and held its first committee meeting on 27th March, 1876. The Rakaia area had received a number of settlers from Northern Ireland and had a strong representation of Presbyterians. The first services were held in various houses and halls but in 1877 collections were taken with a view to building a new church. A section was purchased on Bridge Street but funds were slow in accumulating. Five acres of land was purchased from Acton and a new manse was built in 1880 on the rise along the Old Main South Road (Jim Brown). Meanwhile the school was used as the church and when the room became too crowded and the desks too small another move was made to use the Town Hall on Bowen Street. The new church was finally achieved when, by a great effort of the local residents, enough money was raised to build St. Andrews Church on Bridge Street and officially open it debt-free on 7th August, 1892. The cost of the manse was 406 Pounds (\$812) and the Church only 315 (\$730). There was much free labour and materials made available to reduce the cost.

It seems that crossing the water races was also a hazard to the Presbyterian ministers and so a new manse was built opposite the Church. This was a fine new villa erected in 1913 and still shows itself to be one of the better style of buildings in Rakaia. The minister of that time was the Rev. W. T. Todd and one of his children, Guildford Todd, raised in Rakaia, became one of Ashburton's leading doctors. The old St. Andrew's Church building remained until it too was replaced in 1967 by an imposing new St. Andrews. The churches may come and go, but the two Wellingtonia trees remain Rakaia landmarks.



Presbyterian Church, 1967.

## *St. Ita's Church and Convent*

About 1883, the first parish priest of Ashburton, Father Coffey, saw the need for the expansion of the church into country areas and purchased two acres of land in Rakaia. Mass continued to be celebrated in people's homes every few weeks.

Late in 1894 Father O'Donnell (later Dean) arranged for a church to be built in Rakaia, the contractors being Kilbride and Hannah of Leeston, the cost 475 pounds. Dedicated to St. Ita and officially opened by Bishop Grimes on 28 April 1895, the church was opened virtually debt free with 54 pounds being raised with a collection on opening day.

Dean O'Donnell served Rakaia till 1912 when the new Methven - Rakaia parish came into being with the priest resident at Methven. This continued until 1953 when Rakaia became a parish in its own right with Father James Quinn as first parish priest.

St. Ita's school started on 2nd April, 1912, with an opening roll of 55. Two Sisters of Mercy travelled daily by train from Lyttelton to conduct classes in the church. By 1913 the Sisters had procured a small house (still standing) on the corner of Dunford and Mackie Streets. A full time music teacher was appointed with the first lessons taught in this house. The new convent (now St. Ita's Guest House) was opened on 17th August, 1914, at a cost of 2124 pounds, 13 shillings and tenpence. As well as their ability in teaching academic subjects, the sisters were well known for teaching the arts, many pupils of all denominations learnt music, singing, painting, etc, at the convent.



Rakaia Convent, 17th August, 1914.

St. Patrick's concert was a Rakaia highlight for many years. Children travelled to school by horse and trap, riding, cycling, on foot (two families walked from Mead) as well as several coming by train each day from Selwyn, Dunsandel and Bankside. Until it was eliminated in 1937, the Proficiency exam for Std. 6 pupils was a major event, success in this exam allowed entry into secondary schools. The convent pupils walked to the State school for Proficiency exam day.

There was not a lot of sporting activity with other schools; this came later, but some will remember "spur of the moment" or "arranged" fights with boys from both schools usually at Miss Hinds' corner or outside the convent gates - repercussions often followed either from Dad at home or Sister at school.

In December 1982 St. Ita's was integrated into the State system with that being the last year to have a teaching Sister of Mercy on the staff although the Sisters continued their pastoral work in Rakaia and still do so. With falling rolls, the school eventually became sole charge.

Closing day was 13th December 1983, with 1986 seeing the remaining primary children being welcomed to the State school.



Catholic Church, Rakaia, 28th April, 1895,.



# Movies

The first Movies shown in Rakaia were presented in the Oddfellows Lodge Hall in Bowen Street (Dion Alexander). George and Harry Cromie had purchased a projector in 1914 and set it up in the Hall. The films were in reels of twenty minutes' duration and then the lights would be turned up for the operator to change the reels. A pianist filled in the time with old favourites like "The Skater's Waltz" and "Bells Across the Meadow". Jack Rigby was the pianist, son of the local station-master and he could also play the accompanying music to the films being shown. The appropriate music was recommended on the reel of film. There was no electric light in Rakaia then, so Geo. Cromie connected his acetylene lighting plant at the garage next door to light the gas lamps in the hall. The electricity to run the projector was provided by a 240 volt DC Generator at the rear of the garage housed in a shed to subdue the noise of the single cylinder petrol engine.

Advertisements were shown from a slide projector, the first always being a picture of a lady wearing a large hat with the caption "Ladies Please Remove your Hats." After the 1914- 18 War the "Pictures" were shown in the Town Hall by Mr. Newman with music by Lee Newman and Corunna Shannon. This was the era of the "Perils of Pauline", a five minute serial that "Continued next week" with the heroine tied to the railway tracks and a locomotive thundering down towards her. With two projectors, films became continuous (barring breaks in the machinery) and provided one of the most popular entertainments available in Rakaia from 1920 to 1947. The Town Hall fire destroyed a very good picture theatre and it was some time before Mr. Carlton again began the pictures in the rebuilt Scout Hall. Time and television killed off the pictures in Rakaia and the facility for showing films in the new Town Hall was never used.



The site of the first movies (between Cromies Garage and G. Pluck & Son.)

## *Immigration Barracks*

The policy of the Provincial Council of 1874 encouraging the settlement of workers in Canterbury was to see the erection of immigration cottages and barracks throughout the Province. The Roads Board received a subsidy for the barracks built in Rakaia, capable of holding 80 persons. This building was near the Old Main South Road and a further subsidy saw the erection of 6 more immigration cottages for married workers. These cottages were not built together but evidence shows one on Mackie Street, Rolleston Street West, Rolleston Street East and three more at Soddtown. The 1874 Settlement became known as Costerville (after Mr. Coster, settler) then Newtown and finally with the erection of some more sod cottages in 1880, it changed its name to the more popular "Soddtown." The local sods from which the walls were built had too much sandy loam to stand the weather and soon fell into disrepair and the buildings were generally rebuilt of wood and iron roofs. Soddtown was believed to be a bit of a derogatory term and the address most welcomed in later years was "The Settlement."

Five acre sections were allotted to settlers who agreed to build a house and farm the property. When a married couple each drew an adjacent allotment they built their house astride the boundary, with a chimney at each end, and farmed their ten acres. An early map of Soddtown shows at least forty houses on the three blocks of "The Settlement." With no school there all the children had to walk the two miles to the Rakaia School and return every day. Most of the Hasletts rode horses and some others came in a pony cart. To save wear and tear on shoes, many of the children walked bare foot winter and summer carrying their precious shoes in a parcel. On the coldest days they learned that you could warm your feet in a fresh cow pat.



### *I remember . . .*

The turnips we stole from Oakley's paddock.

The grapes we nicked from the Bank fence.

The great fires from Te Pirita to Leeston.

The screech of chalk on the primers blackboards.

The sound of blackbirds after the spring rain.

# Hotels

The earliest hotels in Rakaia to sell liquor and offer travellers a place to sleep would, of course, been Dunfords Accommodation House on the North Bank of the Rakaia River. By the granting of the licence in 1858 to Chas Flowers to operate Dunfords Accommodation House, the Provincial Council imposed special duties on the licensee. He had to provide 20 beds and 12 separate rooms for travellers and also stabling for 20 horses. This hotel was for a short time known as the Southern Cross Hotel but the name was lost when "Dunfords" burned down on 11 Feb 1871.

"Browns Accommodation House" operated at the same period of time on the South Bank but it also faded when the Railway arrived at the new South Rakaia township. The large portion of this building was shifted to Acton to become parts of the shed servicing the farm yard. The smaller cottage part was towed to Rakaia by traction engine and deposited at Fergusson Street where it still stands somewhat better than on its arrival. This cottage became the property of Chas. Pluck and has passed to many owners since.

The "Barracks" was the next accommodation house built along the Old Main South Road in the riverbed just East of the present Police House. Another boarding house was run by Mrs Rutter 96 Michael Street on the site on Dan Brown's house. Another hotel was opened on the corner of Bridge and Rolleston Street and licensed to Spencer Compton. Penny Compton was believed to be a remittance man of some consequence and later moved to a small cottage in "Sodtown".



South Rakaia Hotel, 1905.



Meanwhile, the big addition to Rakaia came when Geo. Robinson, after the fire at "Dunfords", shifted to Rakaia and built the "South Rakaia Hotel". Early photographs show that the building remained virtually unaltered until the 1980's serving thirsty travellers from the Main Highway until the Highway shifted away.

The list of licensees has been a record of strong personalities, large families and great sportsmen. Geo. Robinson built himself a house in Robinson Street but soon shifted to a new house sited between the Anglican vicarage and the Presbyterian manse on the East Side of the "Old Main South Road." It was said that he wanted to shield his wife Catherine from the bad effects of the hotel ownership. She died at 42, an early age, and he took to the strong drink so easily obtained and died a year later. Alcohol must have been recognised as a curse even then. The Police opposed the granting of a licence to Mr. Sheppard in 1883, citing the same reason.

There was a widely reported drowning of a child in the Rakaia River on 28 December 1887 by his mother while in a state of dementia and intoxication. The local policeman, John Black, had inspected the lady at the hotel and reported the facts to the magistrate at Addington in March 1888.



Railway Hotel, 1914.

The next Hotel to be built, in 1883, was the Railway Hotel on the corner of Bowen Street and adjacent to the new railway station. With the opening of the Rakaia to Methven railway line this side of the railway became an important part of Rakaia. Tuckers had completed their grocery shop and Town Hall. The Post Office moved into the Lodge Building and just up the road was the Court House and another new Oddfellows Lodge building. The New Hotel was advertised as having a commercial and reading room, a private sitting room, 12 single and double bedrooms and hot and cold water laid on, also a large billiard room. Stables were provided for tired horses and travellers could obtain saddle horses for ladies and gentlemen, single and double buggies, and wagonettes for picnic parties; altogether an admirable establishment for Mr. Alexander Craighhead.

## *A Short Story*

### *Arras*

by Laurie Cromie

The big shingle pit at the end of Bowen Street was a great playground for the children of the east side of the town. It had towering cliffs, steep shingle slides and gentle ramps for go-carts. Lots of cover for our cowboy and Indian games.

While playing there one day, I found a silver teaspoon, not an ordinary teaspoon. This one had a gold and enamel crest. I took it home and polished it up and showed my new found treasure to my father. Dad examined it and found that it had "ARRAS" in the coat of arms now newly displayed. He said "now this spoon has come from France after the Great War so I suppose it belongs to Geoff Street. He was a soldier in the army that captured Arras in 1917. You had better take it down to him at the last house in Bowen Street."

Reluctantly I set off to deliver the spoon to its possible rightful owner. I met him at the gate and explaining where I found it I handed him the spoon.

"Yes! that's right, it's mine, you know I traipsed half of France for that and put the other half in sandbags".

# *Police*

The first policing of the Rakaia area was enforced by the Provincial Council appointing members of the Royal Irish Constabulary to look over the scene. There were some tough characters about in those days, with a constant stream of squatters and gold miners crossing the Rakaia River at Dunfords. The Hotel licensees were sworn in and had revolvers available in times of need or stress. The first resident constable lived at 42 Mackie Street (Later Shannon's house) until the police built a new villa style house of the corner on Elizabeth Avenue and Cridland Street in 1909. The building of the railway to Methven had brought about some nefarious activities and Constables John Black and William Rouse were stationed in South Rakaia to curb their unlawful pursuits. A police barracks was established complete with stables and jail in 1878. John Black came from the Royal Irish Constabulary in Armagh as did a later Constable, Joseph Stanley, from Tipperary.

Joseph Stanley had come out to New Zealand to be appointed to a post at Pleasant Point. Unfortunately he was not married and this precluded him from leaving Lyttelton to take up his new job. Nothing daunted him and he quickly took stock of his fellow passengers on the ship and offered his hand in marriage to Mary Phelan of Queens County, Ireland. She accepted his offer and together they went to Pleasant Point in 1887. In 1892 he shifted to Rakaia to be the local constable. Their son Victor R.J. Stanley married Alice Cromie in 1911 and Vic rose to be a top officer in the New Zealand Railway Department. The Police of those times were treated with awe and respect and many of us recall being told as boys, on being found out at night after 7 pm, to "Get away home boys". The constable always attended the 6.30 pm train crossing in uniform and after the departures cleared the railway area of any layabouts. The Police had no problems with Civil Rights then.

Events of consequence that the police had to deal with were drunkenness, assault and horse stealing. There were two major railway accidents, 1899 and 1907, and several drownings in the river, both before and after the bridge was built. A Chinese rail worker on the Methven Railway hanged himself at Hatfield Corner, giving rise to the local nickname of "Chinaman's Corner". Persons arrested were held in the jail behind the Police Station until the Magistrate held a sitting in the Court House. Constable Harry Butters, during his 6 year tenure in Rakaia from 1922, regularly inspected both hotels for breaches of the licencing hours. He had tied his white horse to the fence in front of the South Rakaia



Hotel and was somewhat dismayed on returning to find his steed resplendent in red, white and blue Stripes. Patriotism was applied with a paint brush.

Times have changed and police now have to deal with crime, car thefts and car conversions. Criminals pass through Rakaia at high speed to escape from the law and the Police have to deal with the after-effects of horrific road accidents. Not the least now is domestic assaults and Neighbourhood Watch Programmes.

## *Short Stories*

by Mavis Johnston

### *1933 . . .*

During the depression, older unemployed men were cleaning up the bluegum plantation, which in those days was between the previous school house and the school grounds.

I understand the payment for the unemployed was 10 shillings weekly (= \$1.00). (Perhaps only if working). The trees must have been felled some years before as the growth was only young saplings growing from the old stumps.

The fire was well alight in the heaped up rubbish, when pandemonium! the fire had spread fast and was away.

Those of us in the Std. 5 & 6 room were amazed to see the then headmaster, Mr. P. Cooke, rush to the window and in his hurry forgot to open the window. Head straight through glass then turn back towards his desk wiping blood from several cuts on his face.

### *If I remember rightly . . .*

It was 1932 and I was one of many pupils who sat in awe, as the boys of Std. 6 quickly removed the headmaster's strap, always curled like a snake, from his drawer during his absence and quickly placed it on top of the wood already set to light in the round iron stove which heated the room.

Back came Mr. Cooke from wherever, he stooped (always turned red stooping) and lit the bottom of the stove and what a wonderful smell soon filled the room - burning leather.

I haven't any recollection of the outcome.

Ed. Out come was a new strap twice as stiff which hurt twice as much.

## *Rakaia Marine*

This business began first with Alan Thomson's interest in boats and jet boats. Alan came to Rakaia in 1945 after the "Big Snow" to repair the considerable damage caused to the telephone lines. He was a linesman from Riverton and a very good general engineer. He married Myra Cromie and decided to settle in Rakaia. He left the P & T Department and began his panel beating and painting business, soon building his own shed in Chapman Street. When Bill Cromie retired Alan took over the blacksmith's shop and extended his business regularly by additions to the building. He began building jet boats as a side line and developed a name for his aluminium hulls.

The jet boat business prospered and he moved away from the paint and panel business. A new boost was given to his alloy hulls when Mark Cromie won the Worlds Championship Jet Boat Marathon in 1980 using a Rakaia built jet boat, "Commodore". Two other alloy hulls were prominent in the race being used by John Heslop, a previous World Champion and Norman Bagrie. Alan continued to make boats and repair boats but also moved out into general engineering.

He enlarged his building again and began building silos. Grain merchants were no longer storing grain in bags and required farmers to store their own grain in silos on the farm. This was a huge benefit to the business in Rakaia. Rakaia Marine had been established as a separate arm in the Geo Pluck building and when Alan passed away in 1986 the Rakaia Engineering business was sold to John Kuyf and the Rakaia Marine to Keith Taylor. Keith has developed his own type of small jet boat using alloy Subaru engines. He still continues the repair and painting of jet boats and the repair and maintenance of their engines.



Mark Cromie on the Manawatu River, 1980.

# *A Short Story . . .*

## *Five Foot Nothing, Sixteen Going on Twelve . . .*

by Norma (Cromie) Aitken

I had only recently turned sixteen and my father thought that it was time for me to leave school and get a job. Four years at secondary school was enough for any girl. He was not in favour of girls going to secondary school, only boys should be educated and girls should be at home looking after them, learning to sew and cook. Unfortunately I was only five foot nothing and looked like a twelve year old. Who was going to employ me ? I had a problem. I know ! My sister would have to leave her job at father's garage and look for a job in Christchurch. I could then work in the office at the garage in her place. Problem solved !

And so I became the new office girl, affectionately known as the 'office sheila'.

"Come with me" father said, "I have a car to tow in from Bankside. My knees shook, I had only just got my driver's licence and I knew how he drove like a bat out of hell, or so it seemed. We took off across the old Rakaia road and rail bridge to Bankside. We straddled the rails and the sleepers rattled as if in protest at the speed we were going. Father was in a hurry ! We found the car and hitched a tow rope on it. I was to steer the towed car and this was my first time. We started off with a hiss and a roar and headed back to the garage. "And don't run over the tow rope" father shouted as a last instruction. I was terrified but managed to keep out of trouble on the bridge by looking through the steering wheel. I couldn't see over it very well. Father did drive like a bat out of hell on the way back, and I had no control over it so kept my eyes straight ahead and hung on to the steering wheel like grim death. He never stopped until he suddenly turned left into the garage. The doors seemed hardly wide enough as I rushed in at breakneck speed. "Brakes!!!" my mind screamed at me. "Don't run over the tow rope!!!" I nearly slid off the seat pushing the brakes to their fullest extent. How I wished I had longer legs and was six feet tall.

"Office Sheila" was really a misnomer. It covered a multitude of jobs. I worked in the workshop, I sold tyres, sparkplugs, oil and petrol from the wig wag pumps, and I was taxi driver for the private hire taxi. I 'did the books' sitting on a box which substituted for an office chair. The box had once held two



four gallon tins of petrol. Times were tough in 1940 and father was of the old school who thought that girls could do anything, an attitude developed, I think, after his parents died when he was very young, and his sisters looked after him.

Quite often it was “Hop in this car and I’ll put it on the hoist. I want to do the brakes. When I say “on” push hard on the brakes, and when I say “off” let them off”. So for the next half hour it was on off, on off, while father fitted brake shoes to the car and I sat perched in the car six feet off the ground on the hoist. This became very boring after a while. At first chance I would slip next door to my uncle’s blacksmith shop. I loved the distinctive smell of horses being shod and seeing the horse shoes being made and fitted to the animals. The ping, ping, ping on the anvil was music to my ears and the smell of the smithy shop and coke will linger in my nostrils forever. Inevitably, it was back to work.

Dan Brown wants a taxi for their funeral at two o’clock” father said, “will you do it as I haven’t got time. His daughter’s baby has died”. My mind froze, I didn’t think I was up to doing funerals on my own. However I reluctantly did as I was told and called at Dan Brown’s place. I knocked on the door. “Taxi”, I said confidently, but I don’t think Dan believed me. I could hardly believe myself. Dan looked somewhat nonplused. “Would you please carry the coffin out and put it in the boot of the car” Dan said. “Me”! I said, not recognising my own squeaky voice, which shot out about two octaves higher than usual. I thought I was to take the mourners to the Cemetery, not be the hearse as well. Dan must have seen me reel back and the fear on my face, so he decided to do it himself. We set off for the Cemetery and as instructed, I drove right up to the hole that had been dug, making sure that I didn’t overshoot.

Girls sure can do anything, I thought, and me, five foot nothing, sixteen going on twelve.

I had only just got back when I was told, “Will you go up to the pub and pick up Jimmy McCoy and take him home to his hut at Sometown. Go into the bar and look for him~ thought, ‘what next!’ “You have to go across the paddocks as his hut is by the river. It is pension day and he will be drunk, but harmless, so take the mat off the floor and put it on the back seat and make him sit on it”. I knew it was about three miles to Sometown and that he would have a load of booze to take home. I went and picked up Jimmy from the pub. He wore a brown tweed overcoat but there was a large terra cotta stain on the back! . . . now I knew why father had said ‘mat . . on . . seat’. My father took pride in his cars and never liked them full of ‘bullshit and straw’ as he put it. I was pleased Jimmy was drunk, although I must admit it was a bit scary. I thought, ‘What kind of father would send his daughter on a mission like this . . . and me, five foot nothing . . . sixteen going on twelve !”

# ***STREET NAMES OF RAKAIA . . .***

The first survey of Rakaia began in 1869 when the line of the Great South Railway was declared. The square block of the township was placed on a north/south axis at an angle to the proposed railway line. This resulted in the many awkward shapes and corners and short streets visible in Rakaia today. The survey is dated 1873. The Surveyor, Robert Park, was employed by the Canterbury Provincial Council. The survey was completed from Cridland Street west and from Tancred Street east in 1879. The names were by now firmly anchored to the town being generally derived from governors, early Canterbury settlement political figures and early Rakaia settlers.

## ***Normanby -***

New Zealand Governor, Earl of Normanby passed through Rakaia on the first train to Dunedin in 1878

## ***Dunford -***

William, early settler, shepherd on Acton, ferryman first Accommodation House North Bank, manager of Lavington

## ***Michael -***

No known reference as to source

## ***Rolleston -***

William, early settler at Mt. Algidus 1865, last Superintendent of Canterbury Provincial Council 1876. Minister of Lands. Instituted the building of immigrant cottages e.g. Sometown

## ***Elizabeth -***

Formerly Main Methven Road renamed for the accession of the Queen Elizabeth II in 1953

## ***Bowen -***

Charles Christopher, Inspector of Police, Canterbury Provincial Council, Editor of Lyttelton Times. Member of Parliament, prominent in field of education.

## ***Fergusson -***

Sir James, a Scot of military background, became Governor of New Zealand 1873 - 74

***Robinson -***

George, early settler in 'Dunfords' till February 1871. Built South Rakaia Hotel 1872 and residence in Robinson Street.

***Hardy -***

Charles A.C. Early storekeeper from 1879, resident in nursery property on Hardys Road. Member of Parliament 1899.

***Cridland -***

Henry J. Member of Provincial Council. Runholder of Spaxton.

***Mackie -***

Rev. Charles. Early settler 1852. Took up Lavington 1853, resident in Rakaia 1861 with run 174 of 640 acres 2.5 miles west of 'Acton' homestead

***Chapman -***

Edward, early settler on Acton 1857. Justice of the Peace. Married Miss Fereday of Oakleigh, Southbridge

***Tancred -***

Henry John, founder member of Canterbury Association in 1850. Resident Magistrate for Lyttelton. Keeper of the Public Records. Member of Parliament, prominent in field of education.

***Bridge -***

leads to the Rakaia Road and Rail Bridge 1873

***Old Main South Road -***

this led from the Rakaia River crossing to Ashburton. The east boundary of the town.

***Railway Terrace -***

east and west, each side of the Railway line.

***South or West Town Belt -***

at appropriate sides of Town Plan, the river forming the north boundary, Rakaia Terrace.

***Pitt -***

F. Manager of Rokeby Station, early settler.

***Alford Forest Road -***

an angle road from the Old Main South Road towards Mount Somers. Dead straight using Mount Somers as a guide for travellers to Alford Forest.



# *Rakaia Grandparents*

## **Pat Timings**

From about 1910, before the Great War, until about 1928, when I was born, my four grandparents were all living in Rakaia. This was very fortunate for me, because had my parents not met, I would probably not be around now to pay taxes and ponder over who to encourage at the forthcoming MMP election.

Grandad Timings was born near Birmingham, UK, on 26th July, 1863. His parents had the Yew Tree Inn, in Worcestershire when he was a child, and if you ever visit it, be careful not to split your head on the big oak beam which you encounter just inside the door. Thomas Patrick was described as a “fly one” by an old lady who once worked for the family, and his later life encourages you to think she meant he was a bit of a rascal.

In 1883, he journeyed to the Red River area in Manitoba, Canada, with his Ancill cousins, ‘but did not settle there, instead he served overseas somewhere with a Guards regiment, got into a bit of amorous bother, and eventually was assisted to come to New Zealand about 1890. He married Catherine Herlihy, an assisted immigrant from County Kerry, Ireland, in Lyttelton in 1893. My father was born in Wellington the following year, and after moving round in various jobs, mostly in the railway, Grandad became the bridgekeeper at the north end of the Rakaia Bridge about 1910. His job was to see that people and horses and buggies and those new fangled cars were not trying to use the bridge at the same time as the trains, because someone would have finished up in the river. The family stayed there until about 1930, when they retired to New Brighton.

My father, Maurice, went into the NZ Railway, then when the Great War broke out, in 1914, went away with D Company, 8th Reinforcements, becoming part of the 2nd Otago Infantry Regiment. He was too late for Gallipoli, luckily, and even more luckily, was wounded on 15th September, 1916 at the final battle of the Somme, in France, and was back in Rakaia before the war ended in 1918. He opened a hairdresser business which was not a success, probably because he gave his cobblers free haircuts, and spent the rest of his working life with NZR, initially in Ashburton, where I was born.

Grandad’s picture appears on page 10 of the “Rakaia and Consolidated Schools Centennial” booklet, compiled by Cecilia Adams in 1972. My father’s name appears on page 55 of “South of the Selwyn a Centennial Digest”, produced by Jack Mackie in 1979. Several of the other names included in the Mead-Te Piritā Roll Of Honour also appear in our family trees.

We have a greater Rakaia involvement on my mother’s side. A great number of Shannons and Stevensons went to the Rakaia School, from about 1890 on.

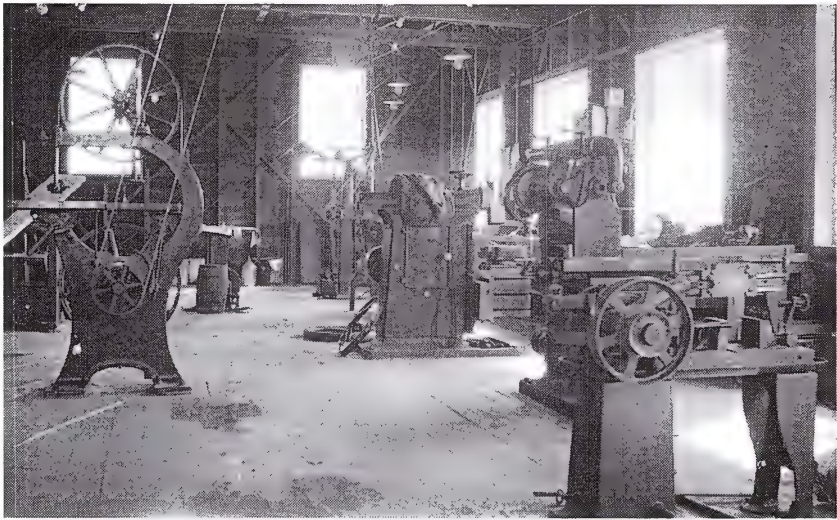
Charles Shannon, born in Co. Donegal, Ireland in 1864, came out to New Zealand with his older brother, Robert, and his widowed mother, on the emigrant ship "Blairgowrie" in 1875. An older brother William, came out a year earlier, but settled in the North Island. There were other children too: we don't know how they got here, but Matilda married George Clarke, Elizabeth married a Pye, then a Meachem, and Beth married a Stevenson, all Rakaia names. I would like to know more about these groups.

Older brother Robert married a Kathleen Taylor. Their children were Kathleen, called Biddy, who married a Cornelius. William, who was called Paddy. Elizabeth Jane, who married a Weaver, Ruby, who also married a Cornelius. Robert, who was of course called John, and Ardagh, who married a Barber, and was called "Doods", I understand. But they are not my family group. I mention them only because someone might know more about them.

My grandfather was Charles, carpenter of Mackie Street, trading in 1913 as Shannon and Haslett, building contractors. All of his children went to Rakaia School between 1895 and 1923. I must thank Lyn Jones of the Mid-Canterbury Family History Group, for records of this. Older readers might remember some of them, so I will tell my clever little computer to move to the next page where I will list them.

### **Children of Charles Shannon and Sarah Jane, nee Stevenson.**

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| Allan.  | He married Ada Stokes, lived over the road with an aggressive magpie, and four cousins.   |
| Mina    | Married Bob Jones and went to Temuka.   |
| Les.    | Married Hilda Price, after surviving Gallipoli, N Z Post Office. Margaret. My mother, usually called Maggie or Fairy. She married my father. Believe it.  |
| Gordon. | Lived in North Island   |
| Jack.   | Became a teacher, taught round mid Canterbury, drowned in the Waimakariri River in 1926 on a rafting trip, based on kerosene tins, with Carrington and Brassington.   |
| Corunna | Married Ted Slattery, living in Leeston, N Z's oldest serving Father Christmas !  |
| Hilda   | The red-headed one, married Oliver Croy.  |
| Bill.   | Married Thora Thornas, died quite recently in Ashburton, Post Office also, and golf.  |
| Tom.    | Married Joan Breach, living in Hamilton now. Carpenter. I remember his bach on the Mackie Street property, where he had a phonograph and records of "Barnacle Bill the Sailor" and a song about "a dirty little pill went rolling down the hill." Golf again? |



Shannon's Joinery Shop, Mackie Street, 1910.



Rakaia Ladies Hockey Club, 1915.

Back Row: Anne Edgington, Elsie Pluck (Bell), Lucy Mead (Weaver),  
Dina Stubbs (Johnston).

Front Row: Eva Saunders, Cassiah Smith (Sissy), Maggie Shannon, Dolly Magson.



My recollections of Rakaia are pretty sketchy, mostly of visits there with my mother and younger brother, Tony. I can recall walking over the rail bridge with Aunt Corunna, when her shoe became stuck in a gap, and how terrified I was that a train might come along and do for us all. I recall getting up early and walking a couple of blocks south to where there was a row of steam engines, massive things, which towed the machinery round at harvest time. My mother was at one time Captain of the Rakaia Hockey team, but of course I wasn't thought of then. My country cousins took us down on the riverbed shooting rabbits. Grandad let us make things in the big workshop on the south side of the house, and I can recall asking him why he had coffins up in the rafters. Not really a history of Rakaia, is it ? Some older, female cousins, took us to the pictures, and flirted with boys.

The Stevensons also played a part in early Rakaia Just as I remember Granny Timings as a dumpy little woman with an Irish speech, I recall Granny Shannon as a lean and taciturn Scottish lady.

John Stevenson. born in Ayrshire Scotland in 1848, was a widower when he emigrated to New Zealand on the emigrant ship "Timaru" in 1876. Travelling also on "Timaru" were his older brother Thomas, with his wife Margaret and three children. They all settled in Rakaia, and apparently few realised that the children, John, Betsy, and Sarah. were actually John's, as he lived separately. Tom and Maggie Stevenson had three children of their own born in Rakaia, Corunna, who married a Cornelius, Jeannie, who ran a small hospital I believe, and James, who married Maud Haslett.

There were actually six children in Hugh Stevenson and Jean (McWhirter)'s family. They must have had a lonely old age. Their oldest daughter, Janet, went to the U.S.A. the next daughter, Margaret, also came out to N.Z., and married William Caldwell, the well known Christchurch musician - Doug Caldwell, being a great grandson. James also came to N.Z. by way of the Australian goldfields, I think, and settled in Otago, and their youngest daughter, Elizabeth married and lived with the Sassenachs in Surrey, U.K.

Granny Shannon had a younger sister and brother, about whom I know very little. Betsy, who came out as a solemn little four year old, married a Walker and I do know they had four children. Eric, Corunna, Myra and Bessie. John who was two on the boat out, has been lost, unfortunately there are a great number of that name in records, but perhaps some day we will locate his descendants.

I have Mother's photo album, small photos in black, white and sepia, collected and mounted in the early nineteen hundreds. None is named. There is a shop with a large front, possibly Pyes where she worked before her marriage, many children in the cumbersome clothing of the times, she and Hilda dressed in their husbands' military uniforms, and a number of family groups. Too late to ask about them now !

# **MARY METCALF**

**commonly known as NELLIE BREACH**  
**1875 -1972**

## ***A PIONEER WOMAN***

Strong, robust, hard working, capable and adaptable to any circumstance are some of the qualities of a pioneer woman.

Nellie Breach didn't fulfil all of these requirements, she was neither strong nor robust, but small and dainty, if one could be dainty in navy serge and black buttoned boots, and her bonnet framed golden curls, blue eyes and delicate features. Her vital statistics included an eighteen inch waist and she was just a feather weight at seven stone.

She had a wonderful strength of character, plenty of courage and determination, and an overwhelming trust in God.

As a Salvation Army Lassie she came to New Zealand in May 1899 and her first appointment was to Queenstown and the Goldfields of Central Otago. Coming from Melbourne, Nellie was a stranger to ice, snow and the Arctic conditions of that Central Otago winter, and it was one of the coldest she ever experienced. To illustrate the severe cold, the turbulent waters at the junction of the Kawerau and Clutha rivers meeting at Cromwell were frozen over.

It was not only water that froze, the contents of the bottles on the hotel shelves too and remained standing after the bottles broke.

She worked and witnessed in that area as far north as Glenorchy and Kingston by steamer and Arrowtown, Cromwell and Alexandra on roads that barely deserved the name, through the Cromwell gorge glazed with ice, and to the Goldfields where the roads were only mud tracks.

Her transport (or mode of travel) was on foot, horse back or Cobb & Co coaches. It was her proud boast that she had never fallen from a horse, but she had many near escapes. She never forgot her first ride on a horse, seated side-saddle she urged the horse forward but it refused to go, so a helpful onlooker said 'to hang on' and without warning opened an umbrella in the horse's face, and away they went with Nellie grimly hanging on.

Another time the horse shied and leapt over the rail of a bridge into the river below, a terrified Nellie still hanging on.

The West Coast was another of her mission fields, and on one occasion, travelling over Arthur's Pass in a Cobb's coach they encountered a heavy snow storm and the horses were unable to pull the coach up the steep ascent, so the passengers had to get out and push their way to the top.

Preaching the Gospel, visiting the sick, sad and lonely, was not the only work of a Army Lassie, they also preached prohibition and the evils of strong drink. This needed courage, as in one town there was more than one hundred 'pubs' and it was the only pleasure and recreation the miners had to enjoy.

Denniston was another of her appointments, and if you know the tall winding road to Denniston, you will appreciate this little woman's courage, when one night the Hill was suddenly swamped by fog, and in order not to fall over the precipice, she got down on her hands and knees, literally crawling to her journey's end.

Hardship, poverty, and hunger were no strangers to the lassies and they often depended on the generosity of the parishioners, and one time when they had no money they were given a sack of potatoes, and that was their food for the week, fried for breakfast, boiled for dinner, and fried for tea. No wonder Nellie hated potatoes.

Nellie loved music and it was useful too in her work. She had a good soprano voice, and played the autoharp and the violin. It was while playing the violin at an open air meeting on the street in Melbourne that an old music teacher heard her, and recognising some ability offered to give her music lessons, and on her departure for New Zealand gave her his three hundred year old violin which went everywhere with her throughout her work in the S.A. Today it is treasured by a grandson .

Nellie served in many parts of New Zealand, Maungaweka, Taihape, Ashurst in the North Island, Moteuka, Collingwood, Westport, and Reefton and others.

One of Nellie's last appointments was Rakaia. She drove over the old rail and traffic bridge from Leeston to Rakaia one Sunday afternoon in a snow storm and was welcomed by some of the local lads with snow balls. Amongst these lads was one Robert Breach, who was later to become her husband.

Even after her marriage, life wasn't easy with a husband whose health was never robust, and raising four children during a depression she contributed to the family budget by having boarders in the home.

She continued to be of service to the community, preaching, singing in choirs, teaching in Sunday School, organising youth work, producing concerts for charity and keeping an open house to all in need.

Nellie Breach was a true pioneer woman experiencing hardship, sickness, poverty, but because of her unwavering faith, steadfast determination, and Christian principles she came through, and was blessed to live to the great age of ninety-six.



# *A Short Story*

## *Rakaia Settlement*

by Mavis Johnston (nee Armstrong)

On the corner of Hardys Road and Bakers Road stood the Rakaia Pound House. Late 1920 - early 30's it was occupied by the Liddington family (my time of being near). It was a square plain house which resembled a 'face' (a child's description).

Across the road were the pound yards for sheep, cattle and horses or any other straying animals - pigs, goats or whatever. Behind the yards there was a long shed, open in part and evidently for hay and feed of other kinds.

Mr. Liddington was employed by the Council as pound keeper and grave digger, a much more strenuous job then as graves were dug by hand.

Ed. This house was occupied after 1902 by George Shellock, also poundkeeper and sexton.



## *I remember . . .*

The call of the Kokako in the trees at the old Vicarage.  
The classes of Std. 5 and 6 learning to dance in the Town Hall.

The music of Edna Kidd at the piano.  
The waltz to "Ut's A Sin To Tell A Lie".

The smell of her hair.  
The fancy dress ball as a Russian Soldier.  
The weight of Bill Laramans sword.



The School Today.





